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ISSN 1027-037X: Series II No. 27, 2002



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*The*  
*Pacific*  
JOURNAL  
*of*  
THEOLOGY

ISSN 1027-037x:Series II No. 27, 2002

# The Pacific Journal of Theology

## Journal of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS)

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**Published by:** South Pacific Association of Theological Schools  
PO Box 2426 GB, Suva, Fiji  
Telephone (679)3303 924: Fax (679) 3307 005  
email: spatsfi@is.com.fj

ISSN 1027-037X

**Subscription Information:** Apply to South Pacific Association of Theological Schools



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The South Pacific Association of Theological Schools is deeply grateful to:

The World Council of Churches (Geneva);

Evangelisches Missionswerk (Germany);

The Anglican Church of Canada;

The Reformed Church of the Netherlands;

Missio (Germany);

The United Methodist Church (USA);

The Methodist Church (Great Britain); and

The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge  
(Great Britain)

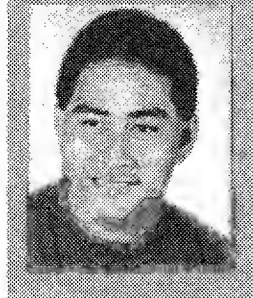
for their grants to the Pacific Journal of Theology and/or the general funds of SPATS that make the publication of this Journal possible.



## Editorial

The irrelevancy of the so-called 'universal' theologies was one of the generative themes I can recall in a conversation with Jürgen Moltmann in Tübingen a few years ago. It was clearly stated in that conversation that any theological articulation which is effective for one place and time eventually becomes stagnant, old-fashion and irrelevant. This statement suggests that thought-forms and convictions are not static but dynamic, continually undergoing transformative and re-formative change.

As an Oceanian and is from the Two-Thirds World, I have been made acutely aware of the 'ineffectiveness' of the existing currents of 'universal' and most 'academy-informed' theology.<sup>1</sup> These are the theologies (which claim to be universal but are in reality Eurocentric in context) which invaded our Oceanic cultures during the initial attempts at Christianisation and Colonisation. These 'universal' theologies have not offered favourable solutions to many of the pressing issues that have oppressively driven our island nations to become poor, struggling local communities. Indeed, some of the remaining destructive implications of these universal theologies are still yet to be uprooted and rendered invalid.



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A year after my conversation with Moltmann, just before I returned to Oceania, I was presented with a gift, a newly published book by the same theologian. In that book, I came across a statement which may be translated into English as follows: "A theology which is married to the spirit of this time will become a widow / widower in the next generation."<sup>2</sup> This is another way of saying that any theology must adjust itself to the social and spiritual changes of every time and place.

The reality behind this statement must become the focal point and guideline of personal encounter with, participation in and reflection on every theological journey. It serves as a constant reminder to take on board the 'hard fact' that any theology that does not engage with and respond to the changes and events of a particular time, place and space becomes ineffective, impotent and irrelevant. If theology renders no meaning to particular living situations, it simply becomes a non-living theology or a mere dry articulation of the Christian message that has no bearing on human struggles and social conditions. To keep theology from losing its flavour, therefore, it must be continually reformulated in order that it might make sense contextually and become effective practically.

The issues which are taken up in the first part of this issue of the *Pacific Journal of Theology* are concerned with doing Christian theology in context. This is not a new way of doing theology as it has been attended to since the last half of the previous century. For us Oceanians there have been previous attempts to engage in this exercise. However, those attempts are yet to undergo the full experience of birthing, emerging and incarnating. Some efforts have been invested in Oceanian contextual theology, but they have to date been only to a minimal extent. The recent Contextual Theology Workshop, held at Nadave, Fiji in October 2001, is therefore a refreshing effort to do contextual theology in the Pacific. The workshop focused on three main questions: What is contextual theology? Why do we do contextual theology? And How do we do contextual theology?





The first three essays in this issue are presentations by local theologians at this workshop on these three basic questions. Sketching an overarching framework for theological articulation in Oceania, Sevati Tuwere explores what 'context' means from the perspective of the gospel and culture debate, faith commitment in the church, and the interaction of 'our story' and the gospel story. He asserts that any authentic contextualization must take the story of 'what God has done in Jesus Christ' as its departure point. The new shifts in contextual perspective are then identified, particularly by redefining Oceania not in terms of her geographical and politically fragmented location but in holistic and ecumenical terms. Oceania in this inclusive sense is 'us', our 'home' and a 'sign of growth and maturity.' The concept *vanua* (land/sea/sky and their significance) is cited as the central leitmotif in a relevant contextual Oceanian theology. *Vanua* as a central organizing principle is opened up by four hermeneutical keys: conception, face, energy, and ears. These are tools to disclose the Oceanian context. By using these tools the sense of belonging and the wholeness of Oceanic life and identity can be articulated and used as a theological resource.

Sr. Keiti Ann Kanongata'a, in a very creative way, has presented reflections on the second major question: Why do contextual theology? Encouraged by other contextual models of doing theology, Kanongata'a provides a constructive critique of the impacts of the dominant Eurocentric cultures and the ways in which the Christian belief systems of our sub-cultures have been shaped and oppressed by these dominant cultures. The oppression resulting from this theological chauvinism and hegemony offers a clear explanation of 'why' social structures and religious constructs must be prophetically challenged. This act of critique, challenge and purification is a prerequisite to doing context theology. It will allow us to be confident about our own histories and the telling and writing of our own stories. The narratives of our own local experiences are the fertile soil for the growth of contextual theologies. In the face of globalisation, Kanongata'a asserts that we must revitalise a trustworthy interpersonal relationship between the global and local contexts. This can only occur in the light of God's self-revelation and loving presence

to all of humanity, including the whole earth as home. She concludes by citing an example of a theological model of Tongan women in solidarity and on the move, highlighting some liberating elements that must be considered in the doing of contextual theology.

Jovili Meo deals with the question of *how* to do contextual theology. Adopting Robert J. Schreiter's contextual methodology, Meo highlights key elements in the theory and praxis of 'education for liberation' as a means of constructing informative contextual models of theology. These include the 'naming of realities' in a given culture, 'listening' to a particular culture, and the discernment of the voice of Christ in cultural processes. There is also a need for critical analysis of cultural realities, identifying the 'generative themes' in the process, as well as enabling a progressive interaction of church traditions with cultural institutions. The emphasis in all these efforts is on community life, its relationship to God and commitment to others. Meo's reflection concludes with references to certain conceptual models as practical examples of doing contextual theology. A challenge to create a distinctive Oceanian model is also issued.

Bringing contextual methods and models of theology closer to home, the second series of articles in this issue provides a frame of reference by focusing on the practical search for racial reconciliation and peace in Fiji. These essays are excellent examples of contextualizing theology and Christian ethical commitment in a particular context.

After an exhibition on Fijian traditional Gods, Fr. Frank Hoare, SCC suggests a sound biblical foundation for understanding Jesus' 'boundary-breaking mission' in the Gospel of Mark. His hermeneutical approach is developed against the backdrop of racial politics in Fiji, where kinship or blood ties are seen as a hindrance if not the main hurdle to peacemaking. He shows how the disciples of Jesus failed in this cross-boundary mission when they failed to listen and learn to actively participate with others who were 'different'. Peace-keepers are reminded of this 'boundary-crossing' mission of Jesus as a means of overcoming



narrowness of perspective, ignorance, fear and uncomfortableness in living together. In this regard, differing ethnic communities are challenged to learn from each other, maintaining their own identities while simultaneously respecting ethnic diversity and distinctiveness.

Addressing the National Workshop on Peace and Conflict Resolution in Fiji, Archbishop Petero Mataka thoroughly explores the concept of 'peace' and, at the same time, identifies some of the pressing issues that ignite conflict and misunderstanding between indigenous and Indo-Fijians. After 'naming the realities' of conflict in the political and religious arenas in Fiji, he suggests certain practical steps toward building peace and reconciliation at all levels of the society. Any step toward a peaceful and renewed community must be inspired by a 'conversion of mind and heart.' A call for a search into what it means for Christians to 'do justice', promote peace and respect the integrity of creation is also made. He concludes with an affirmation of a new hope for unity in the divided nation of Fiji.

Tessa Mackenzie discloses the paradox of the 'two-faced' reality of Fijian harmonious life and agony and conflict. With respect to the plurality of cultures and religious faiths in Fiji, she points out the importance of Inter-faith Search as a prerequisite for mutual understanding and dialogue. A renewed and peaceful Fiji requires a 'go-in-between search' where creating a culture of peace is a common commitment and a sacred responsibility of each individual and ethnic community. This search for reconciliation and peace is an open-ended process. The peace-search process must continually break down human barriers which hinder togetherness and build up confidence and mutual trust in relational co-existence. The role of education and the proper use of cultural tools are emphasised as being crucial to the process of building a peaceful Fiji.

This issue creates a fresh momentum that will hopefully spark new perceptions and actions in contextualizing Christian theology in Oceania. We are clearly challenged by the complexity of the many forces which

impinge negatively on our life in Oceania. But contextual theology is guided by the ultimate redemptive mandate which allows liberating ways of being 'at home' with the Gospel message to be rediscovered.

This mandate will allow us to say 'YES' to the Gospel of life, and to confess that, Yes, we can see, hear, feel, smell, taste and reflect on the Gospel, because it makes sense to me and my community!

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See the detailed exposition of universal theological articulations and the 'context in contextual theology' by Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 1-4.

<sup>2</sup> The statement in German reads: "Theologie, die in den Zeitgeist heiratet, ist in der nächsten Generation Witwe, hat man gesagt." In Jürgen Moltmann, *Erfahrungen theologischen Denkens: Wege und Formen christlicher Theologie* [in English: *Experiences in Theological Thinking: Ways and forms of Christian Theology*] (Gütersloher: Chr. Kaiser Verlagshaus, 1999), 42.



# What is Contextual Theology:

## A View from Oceania

The primary aim of this paper is not to advance an answer but to raise questions. The use of the term "context" or "contextualization" in theology began fairly recently. Since the late 1960's churches especially in developing countries have been saying within the wider ecumenical family that what they need is a *relevant living theology* for their situations. Over the years the search for such a theology has resulted in new and lively reflections of the Christian faith in different contexts.

Different forms of liberation theologies in third world countries are testimony to this. Using the socio-political analysis of their oppressed situation with a Marxist critique, liberation theologians in Latin America have reminded us all about the central place of liberation in Christian thought and practice. In much the same way, black theologies and feminist theologies in different parts of the world have articulated the faith from the underside of history, taking up realities of their different contexts seriously. In the different contexts of the first world, a variety of political theologies have firmly taken their places alongside classical approaches.



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Theology essentially is human construction or reflection as distinguished from divine revelation. It is an engagement where one is invited to faithfully speak about God on the one hand and really speaking about Him on the other. And the God about whom we speak in theological discourse, is none other than Him who in freedom manifested Himself in Jesus Christ as attested to us through the Holy Scriptures. Human speech about Him is grounded in man's apprehension and experience. And these apprehensions and experiences do not take place in a vacuum. They are not purely matters of metaphysical speculation and philosophical reflection. They take place at concrete and particular moments in concrete and particular contexts.

"Context" signifies a specific local situation and can be geographical, cultural, political, socio-economic, religious or the combination of all these. No two contexts can be exactly the same. Each is characterized by specific social relations, hopes, dreams or fears of people. In a large area such as Asia or the Pacific, multiplicities of contexts can be quite great.

Older discussions about the search for relevant living theology used such terms such as *indigenization, adaptation and accommodation*. But they were not sufficient to help churches in their missionary calling in the present. Indigenization tends to relate the gospel to past traditions and do not treat as serious present forces in society which are bringing about changes.

Adaptation and accommodation can also mean that what the missionaries brought was the pure, unadapted gospel and adaptation was a way of providing this gospel to those who did not have the advantage of having a Christian culture. The

*...it seeks to allow the gospel to grow in the native soil to which it is introduced*

model here is the pot-plant model transported from one culture to another. Contextual theology or contextualization moves beyond these points; it seeks to allow the gospel to grow in the native soil to which it is introduced and takes account of present realities in that situation.



Shoki Coe, of Taiwan, one of the early champions of contextual theology wrote:

*By contextualization we mean the wrestling with God's word in such a way that the power of the incarnation which is the divine form of contextualization can enable us to follow his steps to contextualize.<sup>1</sup>*

This raises the question about culture and its central place in contextual theology. A working definition of it is in order at this point:

“Culture is what holds a community together, giving a common framework of meaning. It is preserved in language, thought patterns, ways of life, attitudes, symbols and presuppositions and is celebrated in art, music and drama, literature and the like. It constitutes the collective memory of the people and the collective heritage which will be handed down to generations to come.”<sup>2</sup>

Language is the heart-beat of any culture. And if the aim of contextual theology is to make sense of the gospel in each situation so that the people may be able to say, “Yes we see it. This is true for us, for our situation,” it must be communicated in the language of those it is addressing. It has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them. As far as this is possible, theological discourse in any given culture must move into the depths of peoples’ experience and from there answer God’s call made through Jesus Christ. Contextual theology believes that theology and theological work can only be credible when it speaks from the depths of one’s being “Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord” (Psalm 130:1).

There is no such thing as gospel which is not embodied in a culture. The late Lesslie Newbigin writes:

*Neither at the beginning, nor at any subsequent time is there or can there be a gospel that is not embodied in a culturally conditioned form of words. The idea that one can or could at any time separate out by some process of distillation pure gospel unadulterated by any cultural accretions is an illusion. It is in fact an abandonment of the gospel, for the gospel is about the word made flesh. Every statement of the gospel in words is conditioned by the culture of which those words are a part, and every style of life that claims to embody the truth of the gospel is a culturally conditioned style of life."*

Every interpretation of the gospel is embodied in some cultural form. Culture shapes the voice that answers the voice of Christ. For this reason every theological reflection is contextual. It is shaped by the social milieu of a given culture and period of time.

Having said that it must also be pointed out that what comes home to the hearer must really be the Gospel and not a product shaped by the mind of the bearer or the hearer. The text or gospel is not a general principle but the man from Nazareth or the historical Jesus. He is the subject and must remain so in every theological construction. As Newbigin points out, by gospel he refers:

"to the announcement that in the series of events that have their centre in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, something has happened that alters the human situation and must therefore call into question every human culture."<sup>4</sup>

There have been many lives of Jesus presented in different contexts from the period of liberal Protestantism up to the present. These have been designed to help people in different social locations to respond to the gospel. They range from the picture of Jesus as the supreme Emperor, to the liberator Christ of liberation theologies. Some of these presentations have been made to fit the prevailing cultural ideal





more than the picture of the real Jesus. How can the real Jesus come alive in these different contexts and still be the same authentic gospel? This is the fundamental question that every contextual theology has to address.

Authentic contextual theology is carried out with a deep sense of commitment of faith to God and for his cause which finds explicit expression in Jesus Christ. This commitment is developed and nurtured in the community of faith which is the church. It accepts the primacy of the gospel story and seeks actively to live in the world in accordance with this story. The church can fail by failing to understand and take seriously the world in which it is set so that the gospel is not heard or difficult to understand because the church continues to seek security in its own past, afraid to enter into the territory of the unfamiliar to be engaged in the issues of the world.

It can also fail by allowing the world to dictate the issues and the terms of the encounter. Consequently the world is not challenged at its depth but rather absorbs and domesticates the gospel and uses it to make sacred its own

*Consequently the world is not challenged at its depth but rather absorbs and domesticates the gospel and uses it to make sacred its own position and purpose.*

position and purpose. True and authentic contextualization happens when the gospel is given its rightful primacy, its authority and power to penetrate every culture and to speak within each culture the Word which is both NO and YES, hate and love, judgement and grace.

Where do we begin to theologise in contextual theology? Some would say, "Begin with the aspirations of people." Authentic contextualization begins with what God has already done in the story of Israel and supremely in the story of Jesus Christ. This is the overarching story that must illumine all other stories within a context or culture. It must go on by living that story so that it is **our** story. This ownership of the story must be translated into action, attending with open hearts and

minds to the real needs of people in the way that Jesus did. This is where contextual theology ends as it begins from what God has already done in Jesus Christ, remembered and celebrated in the church which is the community of faith.

Contextual theology is also critical theology. It plays the prophetic role in its discourse and application. It looks for a relevant living theology but goes beyond the claim that relevant theology must be rooted in a given historical and cultural setting. Authentic contextualization always is prophetic (Shoki Coe).

In its critical role, contextual theology assumes a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'. This means that we do not take statements at their face value, even the statements of scripture. We ask: who wrote this? What were his/her interests? What position was he/she defending? Biblical interpretation and theology developed from such probings is either part of the oppression or it is part of the struggle of the oppressed.

As we share in the life and worship of the church, through word, sacrament and fellowship, we inhabit the gospel story and from that story seek to be the voice and hands of Jesus for our time and place. The story itself has critical elements in it. Because all of us are also driven by our selfish desires and interests, we need constant correction. This correction can come from those who share the life in Christ but inhabit different cultural situations. Contextual theology must accept corrections from others who share the same faith with us but who belong to another culture.

## Oceania

The use of the term *Oceania* in place of Pacific is deliberate. It is more than simply an exchange of one term for another. It carries a shift in perspective. And I owe this perspective to the book *Our Sea of Islands*, the opening and central text of which was written by Professor Epeli Hauofa of the University of the South Pacific.



The shift is from the Pacific where smallness is synonymous with eternal dependence; dependence on foreign aid and foreign ideas, to Oceania where we are obliged to write our own agenda for working out our destiny as a people of a region of the world. From a Pacific where Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia are already part of our cultural consciousness devised for us by our colonisers – political and religious to a holistic Oceania that has always been *home* for our people from time immemorial.

From a Pacific that is no longer *place* in a given geographic location but an ideological term for political, military and economic interests of the world's largest, richest and most powerful nations of the Pacific Rim – USA, Japan and other Asian nations, to Oceania that is *us* – “we are the sea, we are the Ocean” writes Hauofa.”<sup>5</sup> This is not a misplaced nationalistic zeal but a sign of growth and maturity.

The setting for the articulation of Oceanic theology in the future is the sea, the Ocean, “a watery tract of the oikoumene.”<sup>6</sup> But the sea cannot be divorced from land. In many myths and legends of Oceania, sea and land are one. The sea is the mother of the land. A good deal of our creator-gods and goddesses are related to the sea.

Quite often in ecumenical circles, the Pacific is grouped together with Asia. But Oceania is a distinct region and should not be treated as an appendage of Asia. We are not Islands in the sea. *Oceania is a distinct region and should not be treated as an appendage of Asia* but a Sea of Islands. As John Garrett has observed, past historiography must be thoroughly revised to allow Oceania to make its distinctive contribution to a history of Christianity in the so called Third World. People must be seen as subjects of their own history and not merely objects of historical research.

The attempt to define and articulate the distinctive realities and characteristics of Oceania in the light of what I have advanced so far is

an ongoing process. We are still talking about it but there are aspects of it that are already in sight such as realities of smallness and vulnerability, the inseparable unity of the secular and the sacred; of land and sea; of humanity and plants, birds and fish; of the living and the dead and so on and so forth.

This ongoing work of defining who we are and what Oceania is about should lead us into four principles of theological discourse along the lines suggested by the *Asian Critical Principle*.<sup>7</sup>

1. Situational Principle

This principle should help us tell others who we are and what understanding of the world we are coming from. Our distinctive situational reality (which may be similar with others) must be honestly faced and appropriated with the aid of the human sciences etc. so that it raises for us the God-question, "What is God saying in that situation?."

2. Hermeneutical Principle

This principle should help us interpret the gospel and the Christian tradition in relation to the needs of Oceania. Alternatively we may have to understand and interpret the realities and peculiar characteristics of Oceania in the light of the gospel and Christian tradition.

3. Missiological Principle

With this principle, churches in the region should be equipped to carry out their missionary obedience in relation to its needs and realities under the floodlight of the gospel. In a region where change is happening so rapidly, churches may have to participate with others in directing and managing change or seek to bring forth order in the midst of disorder in the context of pluralism.



4. Educational Principle

The South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) has given itself a 4 year mandate (2001-2004) to look for a living relevant theology for both its member schools and churches. With this educational principle it should give shape, content, direction and criteria to training and the educational task of churches.

## Contextual Theology in Oceania: An Experiment

I want to briefly share with you some principal thrusts of my present work on land or place which has been an ongoing concern for me for some time. *Vanua* (land), the context of this work is freighted with three broad but closely related meanings: physical, referring to actual turf; symbolic, pointing to a specific view of life, of the world, its meaning and purpose; and structural, illustrating its place within the Fijian social organisation.

Four hermeneutical keys are used to open up Fijian's experience of the *vanua* and its significance:

1. **Kunekunetaki** (conception), in part one is an attempt to capture Fijian's sense of place and the experience they went through during the period they came into contact with especially White settlers. This period in our history was also the rallying point for Fijians to get together in sight of outside invaders. The ideology of "common descent, common faith and common interest" was put to use as a tool to ward off this outside threat.
2. **Mata** (face), in part two seeks to explore and describe the more tangible dimension of *vanua*. It addresses the question as why place must be seen as an important player in the

interpretation and meaning of history which very often places human beings at the centre. Land too, must be consulted about the meaning of events in history.

3. **Mana** (energy), in part three signifies the "centre" or "power house" of *vanua*. It can be taken as its spiritual base.
4. **Veirogorogoci** (listen), in part four addresses ethical responsibility in present-day Fiji. Ear indicates silence and listening, allowing oneself to be addressed by another. This address leads ultimately to self-discovery or identity. In Christian terms, unless and until this self discovery is translated into responsible action and service in the world, it becomes a new form of escape and a take-off point for identity politics.

All four ideas are taken from *vanua*. They are *vanua*-related concepts, borrowed to make sense of the Christian faith in the Fijian context. In making sense of the faith, they are put to work to carry out a number of things. First, to indicate what the Christian faith may mean in the Fijian setting. Second, in the interface of context and revelation, a new day dawns; a new community is allowed to be born. Third, the critical element of the gospel is sharpened by the language of the culture to challenge the prevailing life-denying element in that culture. Fourth, life-affirming dimensions in the culture are noted by the positive response of the gospel. Fifth, the cultural setting as part of God's good creation is taken up as the context of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Let me identify some examples of the above five points in this theological work. For the first, the sense of community which is an integral part of Fijian life is affirmed. It becomes the central integrating thrust in this work. It is the community of living and dying in a place; the persistence of the human spirit to be rooted in a particular locality. This persistence and will is of course universal. Every human being possesses it. We all yearn for rootage, for home. We all need a place



and a home and the longing is as old as humanity.

In this theological discourse we are looking at it from a particular point of view as experienced in a concrete context. The central idea is belongingness. It is not

meaning but belonging.

Belonging begets

meaning in that order.

One will never receive

meaning away from home. What is conceptualised in the *vanua* is life

which does not mean flight from community but being firmly located

in it. That life acquires meaning when lived in community with others.

Not only with other human beings but also with ancestors, with seasons and festivals, plants and animals, land and sea and everything on it. The

community of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit provides both the theological paradigm as well as integrating and critical principles.

*What is conceptualised in the vanua is life  
which does not mean flight from community  
but being firmly located in it*

For the second point, traditional theology which we learned from the West uses thought categories that are foreign to our context and they find great difficulties in responding to the challenges that are emerging from that context. New hermeneutical keys are needed to open up treasures that are there in the Christian doctrine of revelation to enable receivers of this revelation to say "Yes we see it; it is for us." For this to happen a lot of work is needed to unpack the verse in the gospel of John, "And the word became flesh." (John 1:14)

For the third point, the critical element found in the culture is demonstrated in the myth of the garden where the creator-god is neither

male nor female but both. He/

She is an androgynous god. It

affirms the message of the

gospel that man and woman

were created in the image of

God. This note in the myth

throws a critical remark on the patriarchal character of Fijian society.

*In the creation story, the serpent  
is presented as an instigator of evil.  
In the Fijian culture the serpent is the  
source of blessing*

For the fourth point, the relationship between humanity and the rest of the created order is affirmed in the *vanua*. And this affirmation finds ready positive response in the gospel. The culture both enlarges and is critical of the biblical message in the illustration of the serpent. In the creation story, the serpent is presented as instigator of evil. In the Fijian culture the serpent is the source of blessing. The Fijian word for blessing "kalougata" literally means to be "snake-godded."

For the fifth point, the *vanua* with all its different dimensions, negative and positive is affirmed. It remains God's good creation and should be taken up as the context of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. This contextual experiment from a particular perspective is a contribution to all attempts in Oceania to recover a lost cosmos and to take responsible care of it. In his long poem on *Universal Love: Let it Be*, Bernard Narokobi of Papua New Guinea has this to say and I quote the following verses to conclude this paper:

Let it be that what is treasured is life  
That what matters now is each person  
And that alone or with others  
We shall work for its noblest calling

Let it be that each moment of the day  
From the depths of remorse  
To the green valleys of happiness  
Be offered as life's gracious gift  
That each day shall be  
A life's gift of wondrous beauty

Let it be that each person is special  
That man shall laugh and cry  
And let that greet you through your doors  
And the windows that are open  
Hearing each person's call  
As a tune to follow to the mountain top  
And breathe its fresh air of hope





Let it be that we are free from ill-use  
Never more shall we be free  
To use one another  
As the pig feasts on the grass  
Or the man dining on the pork

Let it be that  
Fore our seashores and our mountain-tops  
A black man shall dance with a white woman  
And a white man shall laugh with a black woman  
As the breadfruit tree bough bends  
And the palm leaves gently sway  
To the same sunshine and the raindrops  
That come to us from the sky beyond

Let it be sung  
That life is beautiful  
That each day is new  
And each night is lovely  
Much more so  
Than the richly attire  
Of the palace guards  
And the priestly robes.

Let it be that for our native land  
The river shall have the right to flow  
The tree shall be free to grow  
And the grass shall long to be green  
Just as man shall long to love  
Life and people far above  
Laws, religions and decrees.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

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## Why Contextual?

Yesterday we learned what Contextual Theology is about, today we ask the second question: **Why Contextual?** In other words we ask: Do we need to take into account our life context when we do theology? I do not claim to have the answers and I do not want to reproduce what Contextual Theologians from Africa, Asia and Latin America have written on the subject. But, having been encouraged by them I would like to begin our own search for reasons why we need to develop contextual theology in the Pacific, by sharing some personal stories that have sparked me off to be an avid promoter of contextual theology.

### STORY 1

*In one of my earlier visits to Germany, I went to a fruit shop to buy some green bananas. When I told the lady at the shop what I wanted - green bananas, she replied, "One does not buy green bananas." I told her that I want to buy the green bananas because I eat them. She then quickly replied, "One does not eat green bananas". She then picked up a ripe banana to show me that this*



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*is the banana to eat, not green bananas! I did not want to give up as I really wanted to eat green bananas so with the best German sentence I could put together, I said, "Ich komme aus dem land die Banane"<sup>2</sup> but the German lady typically dismissed me saying, "das macht nichts"<sup>2</sup> One does not eat green bananas!*

My story points to what often happens when we get into a relationship with a **dominant culture**. The rule is set by the powerful and in no way the powerless can be heard or considered. No doubt, we have all had experiences of being ignored and not being counted only because we are too "small" or "too little" to be of any advantage to those who are man-made masters of our world order. Who I am, what I know, what I have, what belongs to me are often suppressed by a culture or a system that is more powerful, domineering and aggressive. And thus I am left to doubt my right to life and to the goods of the earth. I am left also to feel worthless, useless and oppressed. My input is not welcomed nor needed! The dogmas, rules, traditions and practices can become the harsh rule of life that there is no chance for a personal dialogue to take place.

Here in our own Pacific context we find our social structures still operating in this type of oppressive system even in this time and age. Concentration of power in the few on top of the pyramid gives birth to various forms of oppression, division, discrimination, corruption, and violence.

In the Kingdom of Tonga our kingship structure and our language discriminate us into a class system. The top class is the King, the second is the Nobles and the bottom class is the "me'a vale". "Me'a vale" in English translation means "the stupid thing". This is how we are to know ourselves and rank ourselves in our Tongan society. This is our cultural identity that we are born and born to and are not to change, "tuku pe a Tonga ke Tonga!" (Let Tonga be Tonga!). To name a human person a "me'a vale" is degrading. Yet, it seems that no one, not even our 155 years of Christian faith and tradition has ever challenged this



dehumanizing structure.

The Church is not challenging our social structure because the Church itself in Tonga is a replica of this pyramid or kingship model of our Polynesian society. The Bishop/President is as the King on top of the pyramid, the priests/ministers are the nobles, and the non-ordained are the "me 'a vale"- the stupid things! The Church is silent and there is no prophet in Tonga to bring God's liberating message that God creates us in God's image and likeness and that God in the Bible names and calls us with the most uplifting names such as : "You are my delight.", "You are precious.", "I call you by name, you are mine.", "I call you, friends.", "My Love.", "Your voice is sweet and your face, beautiful.", "You are sons and daughters, heirs to the Kingdom in heaven."

Language too divides society. Our everyday language pushes people into opposites: high – low, men – women, parent – children, rich – poor, ordained – non-ordained. The list can go on for many more opposites.

We need to search for a theology that will focus our attention on the real stuff. We need a theology that will penetrate the depth and foundation of our social structure. We need a theology that will purify what is not clean and throw out what is not needed.

*We need a theology that will  
penetrate the depth and foundation  
of our social structure*

Contextual theology will challenge us to theologizing our own social and church structures. Our evangelization ministry must touch the economic, social and political structures.<sup>3</sup> The Church above all must be "self-evangelized" and thus become the prophetic model for other structures.<sup>4</sup>

## **STORY 2**

*When I was a first year student in Rome, the Italian Directress of the Foyer often asked us at meal table what*

*we eat in our own country. I noticed that her reaction to the answers given by the students from India, Africa and Latin America was not very nice. I figured out that our native food at home in our so called "third world" countries was not good enough for her taste. So, when she finally picked on Oceania, "What do they eat in Oceania for breakfast?" I quickly replied, "toast, bacon and egg"! "Oh, you're British!" she replied with no bad taste at all. And so, I made the grade and did not have to be ashamed of my "tavioka vakalavalava".<sup>5</sup>*

I have other similar stories:

*In our Catholic Diocese of Tonga we have a committee for liturgy that tries to initiate inculturation into the liturgy. Thus, for the past two years we have had a sack cloth hanging near the altar during Lenten season and for Christmas a top branch of a pine tree as a Christmas tree. Some of our church choirs have also made adaptation and thus the Tongan white "puletaha"<sup>6</sup> and "ta'ovala lokeha"<sup>7</sup> are being replaced with European/North American long loose gowns.*

*There was a "palangi"<sup>8</sup> statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the old Cathedral. When the new Cathedral was built another statue of Mary was carved from a native Tongan wood by a Tongan wood-carver. Mary's features and garb were of a traditional Tongan lady. When the Tongan Mary was installed in the cathedral, the Bishop noticed that the people kept going to pray to the old statue and not to the new one. When he asked some ladies why they were not praying to the Tongan Mary, the reply was, "The white Mary is more beautiful than the brown one".*

*Colonization* is a factor that demands contextual theology. As colonized people and nations we assume subordinate positions both in society and in the Church. Colonialism fostered in us a feeling and



attitude that whatever comes from the colonizers are better than ours, "white is better". Some of us have been "raped" of our cultural honour and virginity of our people, land and sea. The result of this is that some of us do not feel secure any more even in our own land and society. How true is the "free Pacific"?

*Some of us have been "raped" of our cultural honour and virginity of our people, land and sea.*

We need to re-examine our way of relating to God as individuals and as a worshipping community. The colonizers and missionaries have taught us well to be European Christian followers. We have perpetuated this form of worship with English tune music, Sunday black coats, white hats, Roman vestments, and rituals. Today we are trying to change but "old habits die hard"!

There is a need for us to take control in the shaping of our lives. We need to recover our heritage and give it a theological articulation. We need a theology that allows us to tell our own stories, as the Archbishop of Suva, Petero Mataka has been saying to the missionaries, *"In the past, you came to write our story, please, let us write our own history now"*.

We need to find *values in our own gifts and cultures*. I think Contextual Theology will be sensitive to our subordinate feeling as we need a theology that will uplift us from our powerlessness to our God-given dignity. Contextual Theology deals with the stark truth of our life situation and it then challenges us to stand for the truth and never be ashamed of *"nakedness"* and *"nativeness"*.

### STORY 3

*It was a Sunday Mass at the Cathedral at Ma'ufanga. The preacher was a newly ordained priest who entered the Pacific Regional Seminary straight after being in the secondary school. Father started his sermon with an*

*"imported story" that did not spark the silent audience nor help to introduce the topic of his sermon. He then went on to expound on God's love and brought in other themes as well so there was no "follow through". Looking down from the pulpit the young preacher used the freedom of the space to express in bodily manner the new authority that the ordination oil bestowed on him. And thus with shouting voice he preached to the people who were "like sheep without a shepherd". After a few minutes I switched off from the pulpit and took a look at the people in the Church. I saw men and women, husbands and wives, young couples with young babies, youth still savouring the weekend fun and children who were already in fidgety mood. The preacher continued pounding his words for altogether 30 minutes. It was a frustrating experience for me to sit through the sermon period listening to an exposition of a class notes theory learnt off by heart. There was no reference to the love experience of the faithful. As we came out of Mass some of the parishioners remarked on the sermon and on Father's manner of preaching. A lady then told us that her husband brought \$10.00 to put in the collection but after the sermon, he decided to give only \$2.00!*

This story touches the element of *frustration* we often experience in teaching, preaching and writing theology. Doing traditional theology means engaging in philosophical thinking, translation, adaptation, application from European traditions to our Pacific situation. There is *dissatisfaction* in this type of switching theology. Sometimes we make bad applications, sometimes we are not equipped with proper tools to make the adaptation, sometimes we do not make the connection at all. Unless our theology is meaningful to our people then it remains with us, and thus the "seeds" are not even sown. Here lies the issue of *relevancy*. We need to ask, How relevant is our theology to the life of the ordinary people? The traditional question of *"How can we adapt theology to our needs?"* will have to be changed to, *"How can our needs be*





*theologized?"* Our needs become the raw material for doing theology. We are our needs and thus we are the **"clay"** for moulding theology.

If contextual theology then is not about transplanting, is not about important "potted ideas" from

*We are our needs and thus we are the "clay" for moulding theology*

foreign lands then it must be about enabling "native trees" to grow and be nurtured in our own *"vanua"* as authentically Pacifican. ***The idea is to produce in our home ground that type of theology that is not foreign to us.***

Irrelevancy is also brought about by the fact that we do not have the right people for the right ministries. It is the work of professional theologians to lead the way of theologizing and to develop theology. The fact that priests are ordained does not automatically make them professional theologians. Most of our present priests in the pastoral field need to learn how to do theology. In our Pacific context we have many priests but very few theologians, many followers of Christ but hardly any prophet. Every priest is trained to use the pulpit but not every priest is trained to do theology! *And theology is no longer a monopoly of the clergy!*

There is no need for a long training for the pulpit because if one does ✓ theology in context then the pulpit will flow effectively from the context.

The Word of God does not start from the pulpit but rather from the common streets, over populated villages, "nite" clubs, havens for the drug-tasting youngsters, huts for the teenage prostitutes, centers for women and children crises, unkept

*When the reality of our island context is "tasted" and made for offering to God, then there is hope of us making a connection between heaven and earth.*

hospitals, overcrowded prisons, noisy market places, cheap labour factories, squatters, gullies and rubbish dumps. When the reality of our island context is "tasted" and made for offering to God, then there is hope of us making a connection between heaven and earth. The Word preached at the pulpit will then be expounded with the same "authority,



power, dynamic and compassion" that Jesus had and made effective when he in his time and culture communicated the Reign of God.

So, if we want to be meaningful in our ministry of the Word and Sacraments we do not then need so many priests as we need professional contextual theologians. We do not need long classroom training on how to use the pulpit as we need more experiential programmes of how to do contextual theology. We need a theology that begins with the people for the people. Contextual Theology turns over the method of the traditional theology. Instead of trying the Word to fit to the life of the people, the Word is found "*dwelling amongst us*". The depth of human experience is the data of practical theology.

#### **STORY 4**

*Just last week I decided to pray in my own bedroom instead of joining the community for morning prayer. Through my louvered windows and at 6.30am I could see the most beautiful view of the Kauvai lagoon which is just 20 meters from my room. There in front of me were trees, green and still. Little birds were singing and chirping happily as they flew to and fro and having the trees as their resting home. Then, of course there was the lagoon with its calm-looking surface. Later the sun rose from the east of the lagoon giving the water, the trees, the birds and me a refreshing and welcoming warmth of the morning sun! While being taking up with the profoundness of the reality of life in this exact moment, I heard the community singing and praying the Morning Prayer of the Church from our closed chapel that has the tabernacle as the focal point of worship. When I heard them reciting the Canticle of Daniel, (Dan:3:51-90) calling on the 'ice, snow, frost and sheep' to bless the Lord, a sudden awareness occupied my mind – questioning our traditional way of praying in chapels and in closed doors whereas the living creatures in real*



*life are praising the Lord from their real context. Revelation of God was actually happening in a real way outside the chapel – Creation was birthing forth into a new born day – energizing us with the power of the rising sun, radiating us with the first ray, and filling us with peace of being in harmony with nature. I did not need formula for my morning prayer. The wonder of the moment of being absorbed by the splendour of creation was in itself an act of adoration of God, the Creator of heaven and earth.*

Story Four presents another vital argument for a contextual theology. Here I would like to paraphrase what Stephen Bevân calls the “*internal factors*”<sup>10</sup> for why contextual theology is an imperative.

Among the arguments for a theology that takes culture and cultural change seriously as it attempts to understand Christian faith is the incarnational nature of Christianity. Out of sheer and pure love for us, God became one of us. He became flesh and dwelt among us. God became human in the person of Jesus Christ, Son of Mary, a Jew and a male. Jesus had a certain height, with particular colour of hair and particular personality traits. It is in the flesh of Jesus that we encounter God most fully. Jesus is, as Edward Schillebeeckx proclaimed, “the sacrament of God”. Incarnation is a process of becoming particular, and in and through the particular the divinity could become visible and in some way become graspable and intelligible.

It follows then that if we are to continue Jesus’ mission then we must continue the incarnation process. Through us God must become one of us, black or brown, poor or sick, urban or squatter dweller. Christianity if it is to remain faithful to its deepest roots must continue God’s incarnation in Jesus by becoming contextual. As quoted

from Rene Padilla by Bevan:

*"The incarnation makes clear God's approach to the revelation of himself and of his purposes; God does not shout his message from the heavens; God becomes present as a man among men, The climax of God's revelation is Emmanuel. And Emmanuel is Jesus, a first-century Jew!*

*The incarnation unmistakably demonstrates God's intention to make himself known from within the human situation.*

*Because of the very nature of the Gospel, we know this Gospel only as a message contextualized in culture."<sup>1</sup>*

Encounters with God in Jesus continue to take place in our world through concrete things. Thus God is encountered in the poured water of baptism, in the remembering of the Christian community gathered around the table with bread and wine, in oil given for healing or as a sign of vocation, in gestures of forgiveness or commissioning. But these sacraments are only concentrated ritual moments that point beyond themselves to the whole life. These moments proclaim that the people and ordinary things of the earth, their deeds and events are holy and these persons and things in any time and everywhere can become transparent and reveal their creator as actively and lovingly present to creation.

If the ordinary things of life can be so transparent of God's presence, one can speak of culture and events in history – of contexts – as truly *sacramental*, and so *revelatory*. The whole world, as the poet Gerard Manly Hopkins says, "is charged with the grandeur of God".



Coming home to our own context, we are advertised on the market as "*paradise of dream islands*". This is so because of the beauty both of our people and the physical make up of our land and sea. To top it over we have such welcoming nature, unimaginable hospitality and love of cultural celebration of feasting and dancing. But, is this beauty only for the tourists? Do we see our lot of God's creation a "*sacred ground*"? Are the islands beckoning us to holiness, to something beyond us? Do the islands energise us with the "*mana*" that gave our foreparents power to survive, to hunt, to interpret things of nature and the power of the sky gods? What are we doing with our "*paradise islands*"? Are our islands safe for "*walking ... in the cool of the day*"?<sup>2</sup> What are the cultural symbols that speak to us of unity and reconciliation? Is our spirituality cosmic? Do we utilize the beauty and gifts of nature as means of encountering God in a sacramental way? Do we express the ecological experience in our language of worship?

Do we sing songs of the seas, of the mangoes and coconuts, of the plantations, and of the Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian peoples native to the Pacific Islands? What songs? What music? What actions, symbols and ritual do we give authentic expression of our being as worshipping people of God?

Today we are called to respond to the current and hottest issue of our post-modern era which is *globalization* and how it affects our relationship with God and with one another which is basically what *spirituality* is about.

Globalisation though aims at bringing our world into a closer relationship nevertheless in practice it is doing just the opposite. This connectedness is brought about by the fastness of communication technologies and the dominance of capitalism economics. Yet it is said that as much as 42 percent of the world's population has never used a telephone. We experience in our Pacific region the many islands without electricity, without proper water supply simply because these services are not made available. The decentralization and shifting of transnational corporations businesses and industries to the third world for cheap labour makes

cheap of our people and it is making the local situation poorer. It also pushes the human being into a degrading and dehumanizing situation. This is a new colonization and it will not pass without much resistance from the local peoples. Economic globalization deprives the local people of making basic decision about their life. It also brings changes in cultures, language and life-styles.

Global warming is a threat that we are facing in the Pacific. We fear being vanguished if sea levels keep rising. This is a matter of survival. The saddest thing about our island plight is that many of our people do not know the catastrophe that we are facing. Our people continue to live in "blissful ignorance". The other sad side of the coin is that we try to explain to the super-power nations that we are in trouble, but they do not hear us. Instead, they always look at us as "paradise"!

Greed, masquerading as commerce, has robbed us of our trees, gouged out our minerals, emptied our formerly teeming seas of fish. And, as contact with outside world has grown, foreign foods have brought health problems; alien systems of government have spawned corruption and coups; and the false promise of luxury has triggered new migrations which decimate native populations and fuel racial tension.<sup>13</sup>

Globalisation claims to aim at formulation of ways of living together in one single planet. But the question to be asked is, how will the physical environment be sustained? Globalisation therefore requires that we find ways of contributing to and linking global and local relationships.

Again, it is the grass-roots level, the gospel must speak to concrete and immediate realities. It is the task of Contextual Theology to help people articulate local identity in light of their faith and to relate that identity to the larger realities impinging upon it.

Theologically, globalisation prompts us to find new forms of solidarity at both the global and local levels. Solidarity challenges us to try to imagine how we can hold our world together and how we can treat one another and the earth with justice and respect.



Globalisation of migrations resulted in multicultural and multireligious are realities that are not going to disappear from our world. But can we live with otherness and difference in integrity without succumbing to violence? Can we find a way to articulate otherness and difference theologically?

Back to Bevan: he continues to say and I continue to paraphrase,

... that another factor for why we need Contextual Theology is that God is self-revelatory. God comes to us as a personal person. God is a self-giver. God comes to us where we are. God comes to us in our environment, in our events of life, in our daily history, in our celebration, in our making memory of God's death and rising and even in our death. God offers love, friendship and relationship in terms that makes sense to us – that we can see, touch, feel and understand. God's presence in us and in our natural environment is real and relevant. God makes the God-gift meaningful and "at home" to us because God loves us so much and God wants to be our Emmanuel for all times.<sup>14</sup>

This interpersonal manner of revelation points to the necessity of a theology that takes seriously the actual context in which we experience God.

## **STORY 5**

*In 1999 I gave a Theological Course on "Theologizing" to our Catholic Women Leaders of the Diocese of Tonga. For final assignment the women had to theologise a current issue in their life or in the life of the society at large. The assignment coincided with the parliamentary discussion on whether to allow a casino to be established in Tonga or not. The case, had its first reading in parliament but had not yet been passed to be voted upon*

*to become law.*

*When the casino case was brought up at our class meeting, the whole class of fifty-eight wanted to theologize the casino case by a group effort. We then organized ourselves into working groups and had various tasks assigned to each group. The tasks involved research, raising public awareness, reflection and discerning sessions, using media for panel discussion and public awareness, getting signatures of women, men and youth from all walks of life and from the towns, villages and outer islands as well as from the market places, and the hospital. We even got in touch with some people in New Zealand and Fiji who had already some similar experience.*

*As we worked along discovering more and more about the possible good and evil effects of having a casino in Tonga, the women started to feel excited, emotional, worried and finally "fired up" about the issue. For two weeks the women put their heart and soul into the project. They prayed a daily novena. They met to collect facts, to reflect and to discuss the pros and cons, to discern the reality of the issue – its possible impact on our society especially the families, the socio-economic and cultural situation.*

*The final stage of the process was the ultimate question. "Where is God in all this?" Using the process learned at the "Theologizing Course" the women searched the Bible, the traditions and practices of the Church for theological responses to the question.*

*The formulation of statements was a moment of wonder for the women. To synthesise all their work and findings to one page statements was in itself a fantastic achievement. It became obvious to the women that the casino would be more a cause of evil than a source of*





*income for Tonga. The women then took a decision to make the assignment real and have it presented to the Parliament as a petition not to have a law passed to allow the casino to be established in Tonga.*

*The end result of this collective reflection-action theologizing was that the assignment for the Course Certificate was formulated into a Letter of Petition. This they did and with Bishop John Foliaki's covering letter, the Letter of Petition was hand delivered to the Chairman of the House. The language of the letter was that of concerned women as wives, mothers, sustainers of life and lovers of Tonga. Enclosed in the same envelope, by mistake, was a letter from the Working Team to the leaders of the parishers informing and inviting them to participate in a prayerful march that was being planned to take place from the Basilica to the Parliament House on the day the Letter of Petition would be read in Parliament! This march did not eventuate because just a few days after the Letter was delivered, the Chairman of the Parliament went on the TV and announced publicly that the casino had been dropped out of the Agenda of the Parliament of Tonga!*

My final story is an amateur attempt at "theologizing" in a local context. I think that women theology is giving us a lead in Contextual Theology. The Weavers came into existence to take care of the particular needs of the women in the context of theology. Women theology is a particular theology with a particular context and this it is a contextual theology. We began our women theology by telling and coming into touch with our own women stories. Today, we do not just tell our stories we have launched in to actually making things happen. The women are so much involved in the struggle against violence especially domestic violence against themselves and our children; in the struggle for justice and in the struggle for liberation from cultural and social enslavement.

The gender violence against women, has not yet been recognized and seriously addressed by our traditional theology and local churches. We

*Today, we do not just tell our stories we have launched in to actually making things happen.*

need to explore the prevailing culture of violence and to examine how patriarchy contributes to and is sometimes used to excuse violence against women and children. This is option for the poor in context.

Women are natural theologisers. They have God's given natural gifts that are natural tools for doing theology. Such gifts are as life centeredness, intuitiveness, motherhood productivity, holistic approach to conflicts, and the capacity for compassion from the "womb".

A good number of our island women are already "fired up" with enthusiasm and Spirited vitality for a new world order. But they too need to know not just their human context but also God's context.

Thus, we if we are to mean business with Contextual Theology for our Pacific region then we need to make our traditional male oriented and male dominated theological schools and local churches *inclusive* in the true sense of the word. To be inclusive means equality, full participation and respect for all children, young people, women, differently-abled, people of other ethnic or educational backgrounds, people of different spiritual understanding and all who are or feel themselves marginalized. To be an inclusive Christian community means engaging in relentless struggle, in which we side with minorities and oppressed peoples. We cannot wait for them to come to us, we must reach out to them in love. We must "walk the second mile" and go more than half – all the way. Some of us have the mentality of "sitting on the fence". We can sit at the sideline and argue that the problems are political and therefore none of our business, or, the church must never take sides.



*Contextual Theology is people's theology lived in human society.*

## Conclusion

To sum up, I would like to highlight some of the key aspects that we may need to focus on when doing contextual theology:

- ◆ People's experience is the *"locus theologicus"*. Always taking the person as one's starting point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God. There are many theologies as many contexts but all theologies reflect on the story of human beings' relationship with God and with one another. Thus, our stories, our contexts and our experience give our theology its particularity. These are our starting point. The task of the professional theologian then is to help the people articulate their experience in relation to their Christian faith.
- ◆ "Contextual Theology will not only change the procedure of doing theology but also the position of the professional theologian. She/he will be someone who is a member of the community, who shares the agony and hope of the community. Having special expertise by virtue of long training, the theologian must put her/his expertise at the service of the people, and her/his service is more authentic if she/he remains in solidarity with the common struggle. Thus, the theologian does not sit back in the academy, but returns to the streets to work out practical strategies for the pursuit of liberation, justice, peace and truth."<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ Every culture needs purification and that is why there is a need for faith to encounter culture.
- ◆ We need wisdom to do theology. We would need to discover our Pacific wisdom for a Pacifican philosophy. Do we have a

Pacific philosophical system? The root cause of instability in a nation is: lack of wisdom – of a philosophical system.

- ◆ We need to rediscover the power of ritual, particularly in our Pacific cultures where rich cultural rituals can enrich and, in turn, be enriched by the symbols and rituals of the Christian liturgy.
- ◆ Pacific is people community. As our extended family bond is being weakened by modernization there is a need for a theology that will re-find and re-kindle in us our gift of family "*ainga/kainga*" (extended family) and the "unity in diversity" of our Pacific island nations.
- ◆ Although there is a need for a strong but realistic cultural identity as necessary for a theology that really speaks to a context in its particularity, we must also be on guard against the danger of doing a theology that places too much emphasis on cultural identity as there is a possible conflict with what has been called popular religiosity.
- ◆ Doing theology contextually is not an option, nor is it something that should only interest people from the Third World or missionaries. The contextualization of theology – the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context is really a theological imperative. As we understand theology today, contextualization is part of the very nature of theology itself.
- ◆ Finally Contextual Theology will demand us to have confidence in our ability to work things out for ourselves on our terms and in our own Pacific Way. We must be bearers of hope in our time and society.

I have tried to promote to you Contextual Theology with the hope that you too are or will be convinced of its imperativeness and urgency.



We, who have opted to continue Jesus' mission have a very noble but challenging task of bringing about a new world order to a world that is being enslaved and afflicted by a "culture of death" as expressed by Pope John Paul II.

May the Pacific Contextual Theology continue to be founded, articulated and developed by all of us under the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

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### Notes

- 1 Translate as "I come from the land of bananas"
- 2 Translate as "It makes no difference"
- 3 Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World, (Vatican, Rome, 8 December 1975), AAS 68 (1996), No. 20.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 A Iijian food dish of baked grated-cassava.
- 6 A traditional dress or outfit for men and women of Tonga. Traditionally, the "puletaba" for the choir members is white.
- 7 A fine yellowish mat worn around the waist by men and women of Tonga.
- 8 Refers to any white person from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand.
- 9 Cf. Luke Lungile Pato, *African Theologies*, in John de Gruchy & Charles Villavicencio, *Doing Theology in Context; South Africa Perspectives* (Orbis Books, New York 1994), pp. 153-158.
- 10 Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1992), pp.7-10.
- 11 Ibid., p.8.

12 Genesis 3:8.

13 Cf. Time Magazine, Special Issue, "Pacific Journey: A revealing voyage through an ocean of change", August 20-27, 2001, pp. 14-59.

14 Bevans, pp. 8-9.

15 Cf. John de Gruchy & Charles Villa-Vicencio, pp. 9-12.



# How do we Do Contextual Theology

## A Summary

Doing Contextual theology begins when Christians reflect upon the Gospel in the light of their own situations, circumstances and cultures. It is when we Christians make connection between our stories and our social analysis and actions, between our faith and our stories. Contextualisation cannot be avoided: it is necessary for doing mission and doing theology.

In the last presentation Sister Keiti Ann Kanongata'a soln in her paper "Why contextual theology?" cleverly retold some of her stories, her analysis of the stories and her interpretation of the stories in the light of the Gospel. Like others who do contextual theologies, she is using her mind to think about God, as God is known and experienced in her life and her community, culture and through Jesus Christ. You have seen that she is not only using her thinking, the whole process involves her whole being as she responds to God. In her stories she has given us models of how we can do contextual theology. After reading her paper and the models that I am presenting in this paper, you will have time to categorize her stories under different models. I will be referring to some of her stories as examples of how contextual theology is done in different models.



*The Rev. Dr. Jovili  
Meo*

*The Rev. Dr. Jovili I. Meo is the immediate past Principal of the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji and also a past President of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. Presently, he is in Melbourne, working for the Uniting Church in Australia.*

Rev. Dr. Ilaitia Tuwere in his Paper "What is contextual theology?" gave us some terms used, localisation, indigenisation, inculturation, adaptation and contextualisation: different nuances of these terms point to the common concept of the need and responsibility of Christians to make their responses to the Gospel as concrete and as lively as possible. As we will find later some of these terms above, and others that we will be using, are efforts by theologians to coin some words that are closely tied up with the process and their formulation of their own thinking in doing contextual theology. We will see also that Stephen B. Bevans in his book *Models of Contextual Theology* has tried to crystallize these terms into five models of doing contextual theology, namely: translation models, anthropological models, praxis models, synthetic models, and transcendental models. I am tempted to use these models as the 'how to' in doing theology and at the same time we are challenged to seek other new models if what we will be doing does not fit in any of those frameworks.

In his opening address, the SPATS President Rev. Dr. Paulo Koria retold the stories of the development of contextual theology when he said that in the 50's North Atlantic theology did not fit well in new different cultural circumstances where the Gospel was planted. This development is not at all new because we will see that as the mission of the Christian faith spread into new lands, missionaries were also conscious of the changes in situations, cultures and circumstances. The shift of paradigm in terms of theological perspectives gained more confidence in both the Roman Catholic Church and Protestants theologians. Terms like contextualisation, localisation, indigenisation, inculturation and adaptation were commonly used in doing theologies. It was in 1968 the Roman Catholic Bishops of Latin America (CELAM) at Medellin gave backing to Liberation Theology and its famous "preferential option for the poor". In 1973 Gustavo Gutierrez's book on Liberation Theology was translated in to English, published, and then brought to the world attention. Whether it is local theologies or contextual theologies, the cultural contexts receive paramount expression. In actual fact the incarnation of Jesus, the Christ took place in a cultural context, and the Gospel that was planted in the Jewish culture, spread into different



cultures and the written Gospels or the books of the Bible reflect different cultural backgrounds. In order to understand the message theologians have to peel out the layers like an onion to enhance the real core or the gem of the gospel message. Culture is not static, it is a process, and it continues to undergo changes. That is to say, that in these theological approaches it is a given that all cultures in the world undergo continuing social changes, the world population are getting more urban, and the third world population are getting younger. Urbanisation and youth indicate that traditional religions and cultures are either forgotten or are not learned. Rapid social changes as in urbanisation and technological [information technologies] changes are also sources of oppression, poverty and hunger. Changes is not only rapid, it is sometimes oppressive and dehumanising. Theologians have to do theology in these changing circumstances.

## Methodologies

(see diagram 1 below)

I have borrowed a chart from Robert J. Schreiter book *Constructing Local Theologies* [p.25] that tried to look at how the dynamics in doing contextual theology function. His comprehensive diagram simply points to a procedure and dynamics that take place when one is fully engaged in doing contextual

theology. How does a *A community wishing to engage in*  
 theology begin? Doing *doing theology will find itself confronted*  
 theology does not begin in *with the other theologies already in place ...*  
 a vacuum: it begins in a

context. A community wishing to engage in doing theology will find itself confronted with the other theologies already in place, of greater or less value to the community, for example, in liturgy where local language replaces Latin or English.

When the Pacific Churches tried to take the World Council of Churches

# CONSTRUCTING LOCAL THEOLOGIES

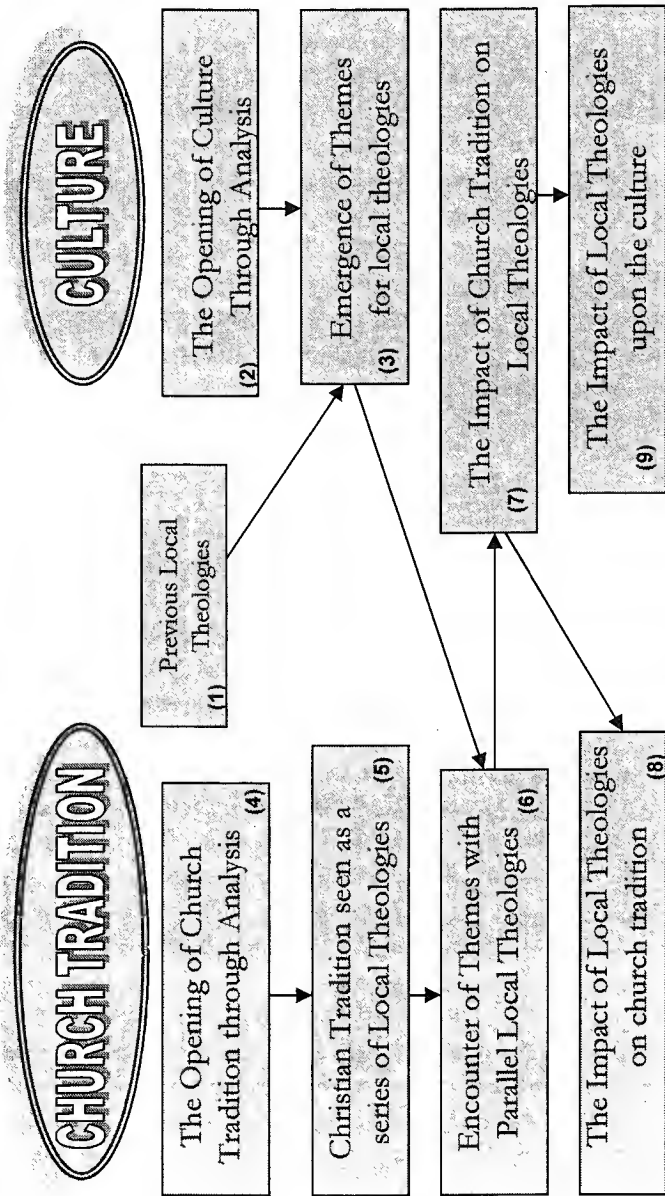


Diagram 1

BEM Document to the local churches and translated it in the local languages, reactions were both positive and negative. A move by some of us at the dawn of the new millennium was to formulate a Pacific Eucharist by using the Pacific Feast concept as an ecumenical approach to bring both Roman Catholic and Protestants together around a common table and at the same time using the context of the Pacific was well received by the churches.

I like to highlight some of the points raised by Schreiter that would assist those who are indulged in doing theology. I have also tried to add a few ideas of my own. You may also call these 'steps' in doing contextual theologies.

## 1. Previous Local Theologies

As a Christian community grows, it receives understandings of God and the action of God in history from others. The community's ability to begin doing theology locally indicates a mark of maturity to embark on a theological process fed by contemporary local theologies. The process is sometimes paradoxical, puzzling and painful. In Asian countries, or in a country like Fiji that is multi-religious, leaving tradition to become Christian is painful. Sometimes the assumption is that western civilisation is superior to the local ones – Tonga, Fiji. etc. In Latin America liberation theology was confronted by the popular religion, and polygamous marriage in Africa did not sit well with those people who were to become fully Christians.

## 2. The Opening of Culture

For genuinely contextual theologies, theological process begins with the opening of culture, careful listening to culture to discover its principal values, needs, interests, directions and systems. To be engaged in the process is:

- a) To have a methodology of uncovering the realities of a culture;
- b) How to listen to culture

- ◆ How does one listen in such a way to hear Christ already present?
- ◆ How, as a foreigner, does one grow in understanding a culture on its own terms rather than forcing cultural realities into the foreigner's categories?
- ◆ How, for a native of the culture, particularly of one which has never experienced the contrast of another culture?
- ◆ How does a community bring its experience to expression in such a way that it can indeed become a fertile ground out of which a local theology grows?

Below are useful questions to ask to enable a theologian to carefully analyse a culture for the purpose of doing contextual theology. Theologians may also want to refer to the five ways in which Christ is understood in relation to culture as proposed by Richard H. Niebuhr's book on *Christ and Culture*.

### ***Question 1 – Hearing Christ in a Culture***

We do not study everything about a culture, although many aspects are vital information. We need to know the culture:

- its source of identity
- the ills that consistently befall the culture
- the modes of behaviour and codes of conduct in the culture
- the cultural ideals and values
- the source of power in the culture

As theologians we would want to listen to clusters of realities around theological concepts of creation, redemption and community.

***Question 2 – How does one grow in understanding of a foreign culture, arises from the role of the expatriate in comprehending the local culture?***

***Can a person ever fully understand someone else's culture?***

***Question 3 – How can one reflect fruitfully on one's own culture,***

*raises yet another problem, namely, the extent to which members of a culture can adequately research their own cultural process?*

*Do members of a culture have enough perspective to describe their own culture objectively and analytically? Anthropology called this native exegesis or emic analysis.*

*Is a native description of a culture necessarily a true description of a culture?*

*Question 4 – How does a community become fertile ground for a local theology? How do we move from analysis to communication, that is, to propose a model whereby the dynamic of a culture is analysed then make the results available for the development of a local theology?*

*How do we do cultural analysis for theology?*

First, any approach to culture must be holistic- we cannot concentrate solely on one part of a culture and exclude other parts from consideration. Either it is high culture (explicit religious belief, art, oral/written expression) or popular culture (folk, tradition and practices). Unfortunate in its initial development liberation theology left out the folk religion.

Second, any approach to culture must be able to address the forces that shape the identity in a culture. There are two principal tasks of theology: to express the identity of the believing community and to help it deal with social changes that come upon the community.

Three, any approach must be able to address the problem of social changes. Some people doing theologies only account for the stable situations and fail to deal with the dynamics of social changes.

### 3. Emergence of Themes for Local Theology

From analysis comes the emergence of culture texts contained themes that in turn are cultural nuclei around which local theology develops. Themes emerged are determined by the two principal factors: a current and other urgent needs in a culture, for example, liberation theology needs for social changes and life crisis and the larger patterns that determine how things are done in a culture. Tissa Balasuriya, a Sri Lankan Roman Catholic priest, said that the themes of self-giving and self-emptying of Christ in the Eucharist becomes symbols that helped to give shape to the social struggle of his people.

### 4. The Opening of Church Tradition

The church tradition is a very powerful force, more especially when we consider that the weight of two millennia of monopoly supported with the force of imperialism and colonisation. For a young church indulge in doing contextual theology, the task is daunting and difficult. It calls for sensitivity in understanding the process of translation church tradition into the culture of the young church. Sometimes larger church calls local communities for renewal and development and this needs to be taken into the life of the local community. If the changes are in the interest of the local community, both relevant and meaningful, they can be effectively contextualised. Sometimes the messages from other Christian communities are important to the catholicity or ecumenicity of the local church.

### 5. Tradition as Series of Local Theologies

It is not surprising that contextual local theologies see tradition as a series of local theologies—that is, theologies growing up in response to needs in certain contexts. How do we see Christian tradition as a series of local theologies? What is the relative normative value of each of the theologies that emerges? All churches recorded normative value to theologies of certain churches. All Christians would give high



normativeness to the churches of the New Testament

## 6. The Encounter of Church Tradition and local themes

In the encounter of church tradition and local churches, actual development of local theology takes place when parallel local themes or need, either in content, in context, in form, or in all three, is sought out. Liberation theology as representing local theologies aligns its Christologies with the Synoptic Christologies rather than the Church tradition which determined its grounding on the Johannine and Pauline Christologies. Also parallelism reduces paternalism and places tradition on equal footing with the local church and allows more genuine encounter and dialogue between church tradition points of view and that of the local church. These points of dialogue strengthen the fidelity to discipleship and consolidate understanding of the reality of Christ.

## 7. The Impact of Church Tradition on Local Theologies

For a local theology to become a Christian local theology it must have a genuine encounter with the Christian Tradition and it must be faithful to the message of Christ. It must be tested against the experience of other Christian communities both present and past. The encounter may result in affirmation of what is happening in local churches or may need further dialogue to reach a genuine outcome. Communities are never exactly the same, there are similarities and differences, for example, the issues of poverty, and women may be parallel but not similar in the New Testament churches.

## 8. The Impact of Local Theologies on Church Tradition

Tradition is necessary for the development of local theologies, so too

local theologies are vital for the development of the tradition. Questions asked by local theologies can be a reminder to tradition on issues that may have been forgotten or ignored. Current issues of rich and poor are the common moral problems raised in the Gospel. The experience of black communities as in South Africa and attitude to slavery remind us that our tradition is fallible. Local communities help tradition in its development by their reflections, for example Pacific communities extended family versus nuclear individual family problems.

## 9. The Impact of Local Theology on the Cultural Situation

Local theology is intended for the community where it was developed, ultimately it will have some impact in the cultural situation in which it was born. The experiences of the deliverance of the New England Pilgrim Fathers and pre-revolution period in USA can be seen as parallel to Moses' experience out of Egypt, and it could be extended to the concept of America as the Promised Land, fed the wounded self-esteem of persecuted immigrant population. A powerful local theology has an impact of tremendous proportion on the culture. The South Africa development of a covenant theology by Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk justified apartheid is another example though it generated a negative impact on the culture. Local theologies feed back into cultural setting helps to continue the dialectical cycle of the development of local theologies. The process continues.

## Other Specific Methodologies

Above is an effort to summarise some of Robert J. Schreiter nine steps as shown in the diagram on how different aspects and dynamics: traditions of the church, culture, social change, the Gospel message, and others are the integral components of doing contextual theologies. From his analysis we have come across different models or methods that can be specified and articulated for our purpose. While I will be





using different models proposed by Stephen B. Bevans in his book *Models of Contextual Theology*, it is advisable for those interested to further their knowledge on different methodologies to carefully read the book. I believe that we Pacific theologians can learn from some of these methodologies and perhaps develop similar methodologies utilizing our own Pacific philosophies, rituals and community gems to do our own theologies in Oceania. I have said above and as we read issues of the *Pacific Journal of Theology* and students' theses in our theological schools, we can categorize these writings under some of these headings. You as individuals may now begin to choose one of your favourite models or methods and begin to write your own theology in your own context.

## The Praxis Model

As a liberation educationalist, and a student of Paolo Freire, I like to begin with the concept of praxis as "action with reflection." This whole notion comes from Karl Marx's criticism of his teacher Feuerbach that "the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways: the point is to change it." It follows that while intellectual rational knowledge in understanding theology is not enough, it should be challenged with our actions. Theology therefore is not only acquiring "right thinking [orthodoxy] but 'right acting' [orthopraxis].

The spiral method is used in education for liberation and other liberation models, for example: feminist liberation theology. The voices of the voiceless are heard as they are expressed in their concrete culture and context. The method is used whenever theology is related to the actual experiences and problems that a group of people face so that the context and theological tradition are woven together.

The spiral method, a dialectical process of praxis comprises four aspects: our experience, our social analysis, the biblical and church tradition and clues for action and transformation. (See diagrams 2 and 3)

So much has been said about liberation approaches that concentrate

# A DIALECTICAL PROCESS

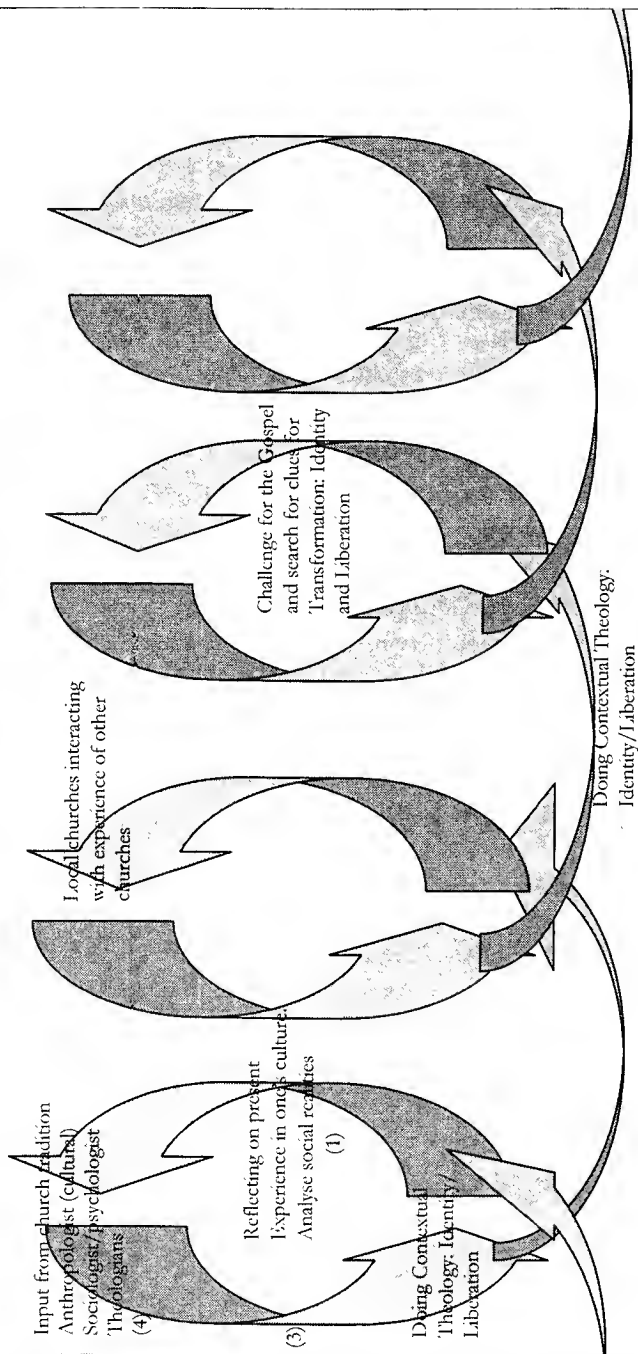


Diagram 2

# A Liberation Methodology : Feminist Theologies

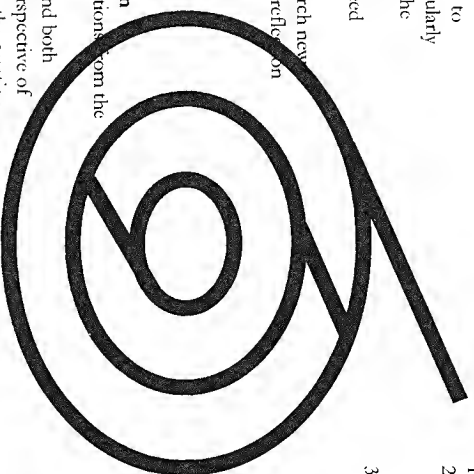
## A Theological Spiral of Action/Reflection

### Searching for Clues to Transformation

1. New ways of acting that might lead to social change, or new insight, particularly in regard to the issues surfaced by the particular community of struggle.
2. New social structures that might need to be created to promote justice.
3. Searching for clues to further research new questions that need further action/reflection on the spiral.

### Questioning Biblical & Church Tradition

1. Studying the bible and church traditions from the perspective of the oppressed.
2. Using theological tools to understand both oppression and liberation in the perspective of God's liberating actions in mending the creation.
3. Raising questions about ways the traditions can be transformed.



### Reflecting on Experience:

1. Experience of a particular community
2. Your own experience, context, social location and participation in that struggle
3. Raising questions about the contradictions in those experiences

### Analysing Social Reality

1. Political economic, cultural, intellectual sources of oppressions.
2. Use of resources for social analysis, such as social and physical sciences, technology, history, culture studies, etc.
3. Raising questions about the ways church traditions have helped provoke justification for oppression.

Diagram 3

*from I. M. Rouse, Yale Divinity School, 1994*

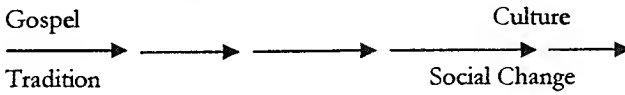
especially upon the dynamics of social changes in human societies. While ethnographic approaches look at issues of identity and continuity, liberation concentrates on social changes and discontinuity. Theologically speaking liberation approaches are keenly concerned with salvation and redemption. The liberation model, as we have heard, analyses the lived experience of a people to uncover the forces of oppression, struggle, violence, and power. It concentrates on conflicting elements oppressing a community or tearing it apart. In the midst of grinding poverty, political violence, deprivation of rights, discrimination and hunger, Christians move from social analysis to finding themes in the biblical witness in order to understand the struggle in which they are engaged or to find direction for the future. Liberation approaches concentrate on the need for change and that the realities of the people are illuminated and coupled with the saving word of God. Liberation theology includes conscientisation (South America), different liberation forms in Africa, Black Theology in USA, 'Mingung' theology in South Korea, 'Dhalit' theology in India and several others in different countries of the world. What name shall we call our liberation theology in Oceania?

Also included in the liberation model is "Historical amnesia" that is focused on the restoration of subversive memory, therefore people can re-read and re-write their history. "Comunidades de base" or base community is where the poor begin their own theological interpretations out of their own contexts. It is part of the process of conscientisation or awareness raising, programs designed to trigger social awakening of the oppressed, people analysing their culture and transforming it.

Several books on liberation theology have been written in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and even in the USA. The Pacific theologians are challenged to write liberation theology also. Liberation theologians will have time to discuss some weaknesses of this approach.



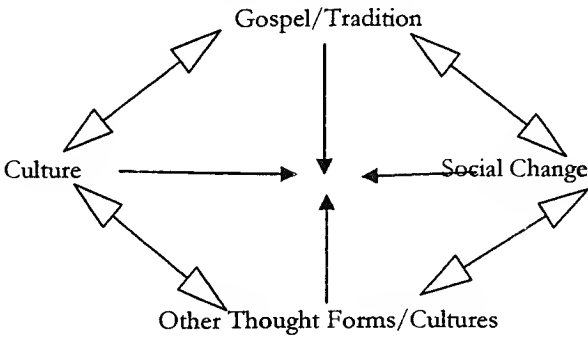
**The Translation Model [Devans. p. 35]**



**The Anthropological Model [Devans, p. 52]**



**The Synthetic Model [Bevans p.86]**



**Transcendental Model (Bevan p. 101)**

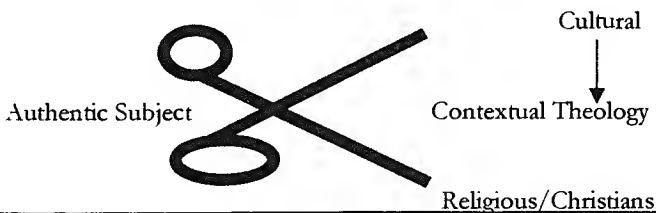


Diagram 4

## The Translation Model

(see Diagram 4)

This is the oldest way of trying to make the Gospel relevant to the people of a different culture. The speech by St Paul at Lystra and Athens in Acts 14:15-17; and 17:22-31 are speeches in which Paul tried to use the culture of the Greeks to make the Gospel of Christ meaningful to the people. The important point is to translate the words not literally but that the meaning captures the concepts within the texts. One of the flaws in the Fijian translation of the Bible is in Roman 13:2 "*Ni sa sega na Turaga sa tubu wale, mai vua ga na Kalou: ko ira sa turaga tu, sa lesi ira na Kalou.*" The text is literally translated as "No chief originates on his own, he originates from God: those who are already chiefs, are appointed by God." The original Greek talks about the state authority and the citizens' duties to the state authorities. The Fijian Bible translates "authority" as chief, the traditional hereditary of the Fijian institution, that is in the Fijian mind holy and unchallenged, almost infallible. It is therefore essential that the person who does the translation should clearly understand the Christian message. When the message is clearly understood, the preachers or theologians trying to make the Gospel relevant or meaningful to the hearers or readers must clothe the language and patterns of the new culture that they can understand.

## The Anthropological Model

(see Diagram 4)

The translation model focuses on the Christian identity and on the other hand the anthropological model focuses on the "anthropos", the worth and goodness of the person identity of the Christian faith. In other words in the translation model one aims at becoming a Fijian Christian/ Tuvalu Christian / Nauru Christian and the anthropological model one aims at becoming a Christian Fijian/Christian Tuvalu/ Christian Nauru. Human person is considered as important in the Christian faith and it does not mean that the person's culture cannot be changed but any change should not be a changed to align with the western or Mediterranean cultures. In this model anthropological science is taken



seriously because it offers genuine understanding into the intricacies of human relations and meanings that make up the human culture. It is through the study of the person's culture and faith that a theologian finds genuine relationship between the Christian faith and culture and the person's faith.

Indigenization is appropriately used for this model. It is a quest for identity. The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians [EATWOT] called it "ethnographic approach." The quest for ethnographic approach or identity approach becomes evident in the final stage of colonialism, the reassertion of an identity and dignity that has been denied them for centuries. After the 70s most of the countries in Oceania became independent and people began to cry for the need to reconstruct an identity that has been denied or considered inferior during the colonial era. The issue of identity is not always on racial lines. This is evident in women around the world struggling to understand themselves in their own right, forging to establish nationhood out of diverse people for a new identity, and family trying to maintain traditional family connection and ritual in the midst of dislocation. The urban drift, the migration of our people from the islands to Australia, New Zealand, North America and other European countries have created people dislocated from their roots. These include refugees, newly urbanised people and people of the gap as highlighted by Dr. Tuwere [ see Pacific Journal of Theology Vol 13], where he discussed his Pacific Theological College students doing contextual theologies, "Oceania images of life such as trees and gardening, water symbolism, *Fanua* and the presence of God, dust of the ground and the spirit and the 'gap' experience in Oceania were explored and articulated theologically" [page 10]. It is obvious that Dr. Tuwere has taken his students in the ethnographic direction, that is Oceanic identity remains paramount in his theological thinking and his doing theology with his students.

Where do we begin? Contextual theology with the anthropological approach begins with the needs of a people in a concrete place and from there moves to the traditions of faith.

*How is a Tongan Christian/ Samoan Christian/ Solomon Islander Christian live in Sydney?*

*How is a migrant worker from Kiribati/Tuvalu/Fiji live in Auckland?*

*How will a person from Ono I Lau [a remote island far from Viti Levu] live in Suva?*

*How will those left behind in villages in highland of PNG do as their children migrate to Port Moresby?*

So ethnographic variety of contextual theology approaches strive to answer questions of identity especially. As you begin to do contextual theology, you will have time to discuss some weaknesses of this approach.

## The Synthetic Model

*(see Diagram 4)*

Dialogue between culture and tradition is the heart of synthetic model. The synthesis take into consideration the importance of the gospel message and the church tradition doctrinal formulation on one hand and at the same time acknowledge the vital role of the culture in the formulation of any theological agenda. Synthetic model borrows resources both from other cultures and theological formulations useful for both method and content for articulating faith. The process is dialectical and therefore can be called a dialectical model, a dialogical model, conversation model, even to use David Tracy's words, the analogical imagination to analogical model. It is inculturation or interculturalization of theology, which is the ongoing dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. It is the creative interactions between the Christian message and a culture or cultures.

## The Transcendental Model

*(see Diagram 4)*

The transcendental model of contextual theology focuses much not on producing the content of a theological text but on the person or theologian who is producing it; his or her authenticity and conversion.





It is not what is presented in a book that counts but what is in the person's mind that counts. So the starting point of transcendental model is one's own religious experience and one's own experience of oneself. It is understood that one cannot start in a vacuum for we all know that each person is a web of complicated relationships, sociological, economical and political influences. All these forces make up or have bearing on the person.

Sr Keiti Ann Kanongata'a, in her presentation puts it aptly, "People's experience is the 'locus theologicus'. Always taking the person as one's starting point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God." Her story 4 is an excellent example of the transcendental model, please read with me,

*"Just last week I decided to pray in my own bedroom instead of joining the community for Morning Prayer. Through my louvered windows and at 6.30am I could see the most beautiful view of the Kauvai lagoon, which is just twenty meters from my room. There in front of me were trees, green and still. Little birds were singing and chirping happily as they flew to and fro and having the trees as their resting home. Then, of course there was the lagoon giving the water, the trees, the birds and me a refreshing and welcoming warmth of the morning sun! While being taking up with the profoundness of the reality of life in this exact moment, I heard the community singing and praying the Morning Prayer of the Church from our closed chapel that has the tabernacle as the focal point of worship. When I heard them reciting Psalm 62, calling on the ice, snow, frost and the sheep to bless the Lord, a sudden awareness occupied my mind- questioning our traditional way of praying in chapels and in closed doors whereas the living creatures in real life are praising the Lord from their real context. Revelation of God was actually happening in a real way outside the chapel- Creation was birthing forth into a new born day - energizing us with the power of the rising sun, radiating us with the first ray, and filling us with peace of being in harmony with nature. I did not need formula for my morning prayer. The wonder of the moment of being absorbed*

*by the splendour of creation was in itself an act of adoration of God, the creator of heaven and earth."*

The most important point in Sr. Keiti Ann's expression remains her passionate search for authenticity and finding herself lifted up or experiencing a sense of transcendent not in the traditional way of worshiping in the church but in her cultural identity.

In your group you can share with us your own method of doing contextual theologies? Or if you do not have a method or the methods I have presented are not appropriate, can you develop a new method that we can take with us after this consultation?

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#### **SELECTED READINGS:**

Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures*, Orbis 1996

Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Orbis 1994

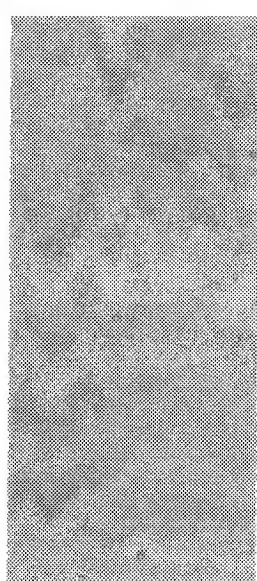


## The Gods of Fiji

William Henry Rafton Bakalevu was born in Nakörolevu village, Namara, Tailevu on Fiji's main island of Viti Levu. William never had any formal art training but is now a full time artist based at the Oceania Centre at the University of the South Pacific.

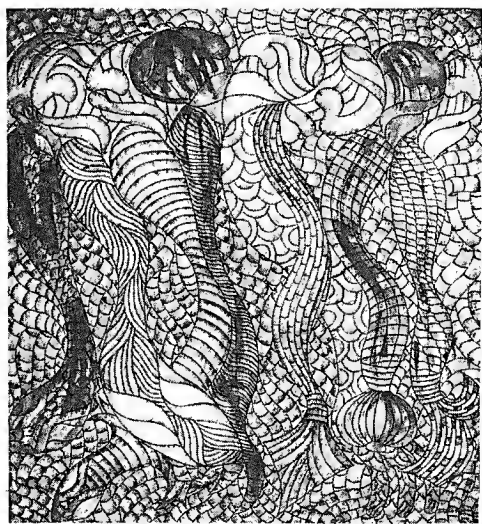
His series of ten paintings, *The Gods of Fiji*, of which five are reproduced in black and white here, arose out of his feeling that his people need to rediscover their identity in relation to God and the world. He feels that the Fijian Methodists have a lot of confusion. Going to Church is like belonging to a club without any understanding of "what God is all about". God becomes something "out there, not in themselves". William hopes that through his paintings of the ancient pre-Christian gods of Fiji he will raise his peoples' level of appreciation of what they have and are. Then they will have a strong basis from which to truly develop themselves and face the challenges of the 21st Century.

The following pages feature five of his paintings called, "The Gods of Fiji".



*William Bakalevu*





**CAGAWALU** the  
great war god of Bau.  
He is the patron of  
murder and  
cannibalism.

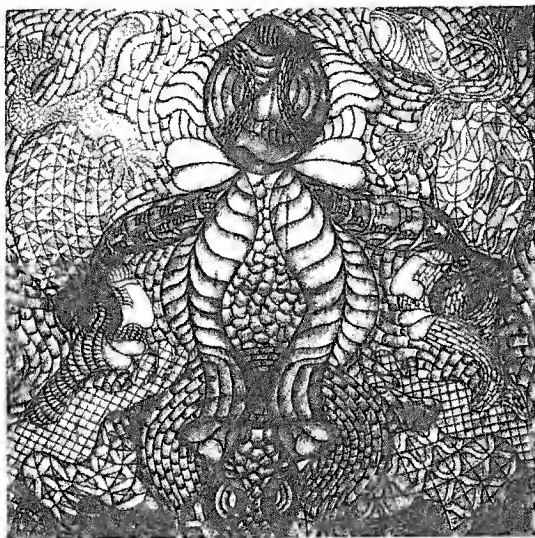
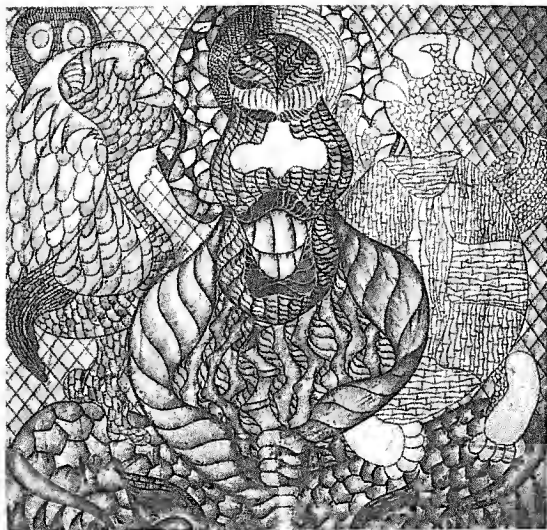


**DAKUWAQA** is  
the god of the  
province of  
Cakaudrove. He  
assumes the form  
of a shark. In his  
honour all sharks  
are saluted when  
they are seen

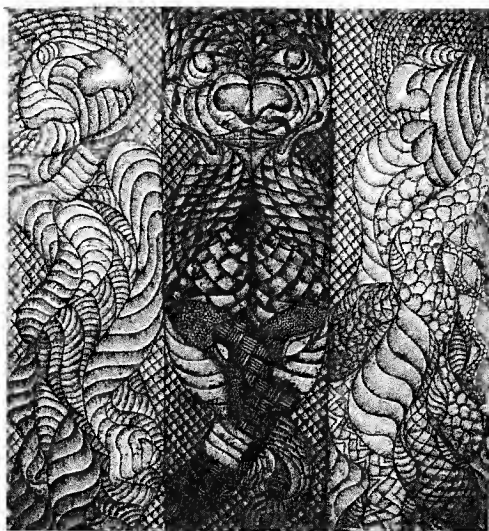


### **LUTUNASOBASOBA**

is said to be the source of the chiefly bloodline in Fiji. Some say that he emerged from a bunch of banana plant, which is what his name really means.



**ROKOMOKO** with the lizard as his shrine, is war god of the people of Waimaro, great warriors of Naitasiri



**DEGEI** is the supreme god of Fiji. It is said that he is the creator of the Fijian world. He is enshrined in a serpent.



## The Challenge of the Boundary-Breaking Jesus of Mark's Gospel to the Politics of Race in Fiji

Following Donald Senior and other scholars I take it that Mark's gospel was written in Rome in the late sixties C.E while the Christian community there was still in shock and terror as a result of the bloody persecution of Nero. Their two main leaders, Peter and Paul, had been executed along with many other leaders. The Christian community of Rome was traumatized with loss, insecurity and fear and felt extremely vulnerable to unpredictable hostility and violence from without.

The community was also torn apart from within because some members had apostasized and denounced fellow Christians to the imperial authorities. This must have shattered trust and cooperation and increased suspicion, division and bitterness. The Christian community at Rome was a mixed multi-cultural community, with Jewish Christians who came from an exclusivist tradition as well as Gentile Christians. The waves of fear and distrust in this Christian community must have reinforced the already existing cultural boundaries. This would have strengthened pre-existing stereotypes and prejudices and made forgiveness, openness and real community very difficult.



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It was for new Christians who had undergone persecution and failure that Mark shaped a reinterpretation of the traditions about Jesus to respond to their pastoral needs.

## Boundary-breaking Mission of Jesus

One of the main themes of St. Mark's gospel is that Jesus has a universal mission which includes all people and all cultures. This is seen in Mark's siting the Kingdom ministry of Jesus in Galilee (which had a mixed cultural and religious population) and in the post-Resurrection promise to return to lead the disciples there (Mk 16:7). It is seen too in the climactic confession of faith made not by an observant Jew but by a pagan centurion when Jesus died (Mk 15:39).

Mark presents to the Christian community of Rome and to us the boundary-breaking mission of Jesus. The disciples try to persuade Jesus to remain in Capernaum where he is popular but Jesus even at this early stage of his ministry insists that he must reach out with his message (Mk. 1:38). Jesus redefines the notion of family enlarging it and making it widely inclusive (Mk. 3:31-35). What is important for discipleship and belonging to the Kingdom which is being offered by God is not blood kinship but the spiritual principle of obedience to God's will.

Boundary markers (such as religious beliefs and practices, communication rules, food taboos etc.) are what distinguish the in-group from the out-group, "us" from "them". Boundary places are interstitial spaces, ambiguous states and, as such, are possible sources of transformation. In Mark's narrative it is clear that the Sea of Galilee (and perhaps Galilee itself) was a major geographical, cultural and religious boundary separating observant Jews from non-observant Jews and Gentiles. Jesus repeatedly challenged by word and action the rigid boundary between observant Jews and Gentiles and despised non-observant Jews.. This boundary-breaking challenge of Jesus questions the response of Christians to racial boundaries in Fiji today.





Race (or more accurately, ethnicity) has been the major social boundary in Fiji for the past century. A paternalistic colonial government solved its immediate problem of having Fiji pay for its own colonial administration by finding (Indian) laborers to develop a cash crop (sugar) without disturbing the culture of the indigenous Fijians. Britain solved an immediate problem but created a future problem for the indigenous and immigrant communities. The colonial government maintained a buffer between the two major ethnic communities. The race boundary around which there was most activity during colonial times was between the colonials and the ethnic Indians who resisted the second class citizenship being forced on them.

With the inception of party politics around independence competition between the indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians became marked. Race became the prism through which every situation was

*Race became the prism through which every situation was judged*

judged. It became the overarching category and hermeneutic and the rhetoric by which the greed of individuals or groups, and competition between other interests such as urban/rural and class dichotomies were concealed. The prominence of race consciousness and its institutionalization in voting systems, political parties, professions and unions constantly distorted social and political debate and made a national identity for all Fiji citizens very difficult to attain. Race in Fiji has been and is the great social boundary, the deep sea which keeps people separate on islands apart.

Jesus traversed the Sea of Galilee boundary repeatedly bringing both groups together by his message and ministry and thereby breaks the boundary between them. He heals from sickness, releases from demonic power and prepares a community to receive the blessings of a caring compassionate God on both sides of the sea i.e. among strict Jews and among non-Jews. So we have the following parallels either side of the boundary:

- ◆ Exorcism in Capernaum synagogue (1:21-28)//Exorcism of Gerasene demoniac (5:1-20);
- ◆ Healing of Jairus' daughter (5:21-43)//Healing of Syro-Phoenician's daughter (7:24-30);
- ◆ Feeding of the 5,000 men (6:30-44)//Feeding of the 4,000 people (8:1-10);

Jesus actually commissions the healed pagan from Gerasa to be a witness and apostle of the Kingdom of God (Mk. 5:19-20). The Syro-Phoenician woman with her daring and faith gets Jesus to acknowledge, against Jewish prejudice, that Gentiles have a place with the Jews in God's house (Mk. 7:27-29). Whereas the 12 baskets of left-over bread from the 4,000 represent the God's universal blessing. The lake loses its power as a barrier as Jesus extends his ministry of preaching, healing, exorcizing and feeding on both sides.

In a debate with the Pharisees and some scribes who came from Jerusalem (in the place of opposition to Jesus) about observing the traditions of the ancestors Jesus upbraids them for their lack of integrity and honesty. Later privately Jesus goes further and actually puts aside the major boundary marker of ritually pure food and substitutes this mechanism of exclusion with a spiritual and inclusive principle of internal purity (7:1-22).

This boundary-breaking becomes a challenge for the in-group, the twelve apostles. "Then he made his disciples get into the boat and precede him to the other side ..." (Mk. 6:45) Boundary-crossing is not easy and the disciples are sometimes caught in the middle (cf. the storms of the Sea of Galilee, Mk. 5:35-41 and Mk. 6:45-52). They were afraid and lacking in understanding while Jesus encourages them to courage and faith as he calms the wind and waves. Fear and uncertainty are typical reactions in inter-ethnic encounters so Jesus' encouragement is as relevant for the multi-ethnic society of Fiji today as it was for the mixed Christian community in first century Rome.

The encounters between Indians and Fijians whether in the political or



social arenas, at a national or local level are encounters at interstitial spaces where, if there is openness of attitude, both sides can move out from their own cultural matrix and negotiate at the boundary. The definition and meaning of their communications will rest neither with the speaker, or with the hearer, nor in the content communicated as assessed by a third party. Rather the meaning of their communication will be found in the "social judgment" of both parties to the dialogue i.e. in the repeated interactions which may create a new reality. This process is exemplified in the production by political leaders on both sides of the 1997 Constitution. Unfortunately the dialogue did not include the ordinary people and their lack of participation and understanding left them firmly polarized on their own side of the boundary and vulnerable to manipulation by some unscrupulous politicians, businessmen and leaders.

## Blindness and Understanding

Racial polarization thrives on stereotypes and prejudices. These are social beliefs and feelings (often negative) which one group holds about another. The beliefs are over-simplified, generalized and resist change even when there is evidence to the opposite available.

Stereotypes, prejudice, and myth-making tend to blind and distort understanding.

They lead to a dynamic of

justifactory solidarity with ones in-group by projecting a sense of non-importance or of evil on the out-group.

*The beliefs are over-simplified, generalized and resist change even when there is evidence to the opposite available.*

I have heard some Fijians say that for them Indians in Fiji were hazy figures with whom one interacted on shallow level of business transaction. They didn't really see them as socially significant people. That was brought home to me after preaching a homily on the universal reconciliation portrayed in the crucifixion mural in the Navunibitu church,

which depicts Fijians approaching the cross with their cultural symbols from one side and Indians approaching with their cultural symbols from the other. In the prayers of the faithful which followed the Fijian parishioners prayed for their ancestors, their culture, the missionaries – for everything, except their Indian neighbors. They never attended to and didn't "see" one side of the mural.

On the other hand I have heard old Indian men tell other Indians that when the indenture ship, the Syria, was wrecked on the Nasilai reef outside Suva harbor, Indian survivors were cannibalized by Fijians. The truth is the polar opposite. Many more Indians would have drowned if Fijians had not risked their own lives to put to sea in boats and save them. The myth being relayed had more to do with current fears and animosity than with the actual history.

Mark places Jesus' teaching on discipleship (8:27 – 10:45) between two healing incidents. In the first case some people brought a blind man to Jesus at Bethsaida (Mk. 8:22-26) and begged him to touch him. This healing came in two stages, partial sight after Jesus rubbed spittle on his eyes and full sight when later he placed his hands on the eyes. In the second incident Bartimaeus (a symbol of what exclusive society does to the poor – makes them beggars) surmounts the opposition of the crowd and attracts Jesus' attention. He casts off his mantle (symbol of his old identity) asks with faith for his sight and receives it immediately. This suggests, by contrast with the Bethsaida healing, that firm personal

*To overcome racial prejudice also requires faith, shown by overcoming opposition, brings insight (spiritual sight or understanding). "Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way" (Mk. 10:52). The "way" means discipleship leading to the carrying of the cross. To overcome racial prejudice also requires strong faith and often resisting the pressure of one's own community which finds it convenient to continue to use the other ethnic group as a scapegoat. Insight and new vision allows us to see a way forward but it also challenges us to make the necessary sacrifices.*



The last supper account in Mark (Mk. 14:12-26) is placed between two incidents of failure of the twelve disciples – the betrayal of Judas (Mk. 14:10-11) and the prediction of Peter's denial (Mk. 14:27-31). Jesus offering of his life as a sacrifice and life-giving food for all people is framed between the selfish failures of his chosen friends and disciples.

These are the culminations of previous failures of understanding on the part of the disciples. After Jesus fed the 4,000 people with bread on the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee he is accosted by the Pharisees who refuse to credit the Kingdom sign of people of all races called to a common meal. Instead they demand a sign from heaven. Jesus refuses to give such a sign and instead warns the disciples in the boat against the corrupting influence of the power of the Pharisees. The disciples, who have only one loaf for the journey on the boundary lake, seem to willfully take a shallow worldly meaning out of Jesus' warning. "Do you not yet understand" rebuked Jesus, and he continues to point to the extravagant bounty of God in inviting people from both shores to the banquet of the Kingdom (Mk. 8:14-21).

By contrast with the disciples the women, who are unnamed *anawim*, unimportant in their culture and time, understand Jesus' message. Peter's mother-in-law, after being healed from her fever by Jesus gets up and serves (*diakonia*), the first time we meet that key word in Jesus' ministry and teaching. She is a precursor of the other women who ministered to the needs of Jesus and the disciples on the way (Mk. 15:40-41). The Syro-Phoenician woman, too, understood the possibility of Gentiles sharing in the banquet of the Kingdom of God. Jesus praises the widow (Mk. 12:43) for handing over her whole livelihood to the temple (as Jesus is about to hand over his life for all) and especially the woman who anointed his head with spikenard; "She has done what she could. She has anticipated anointing my body for burial." (Mk. 14:8).

So we have the paradox of the outsiders (unnamed and unrecognized women and the poor blind men) becoming disciples while the supposed insiders (the chosen twelve disciples, like the chosen people Israel) being

blind, through hardness of heart. The young man in the garden of Gethsemane who on being seized by the temple guards cast off his mantle in fear and ran away (Mk. 14:51-52) is a symbol of the failure of all the male disciples. But was it the same young man dressed in a white robe who announced the resurrection to the women? Certainly Jesus prophesizes the failure of his disciples and yet offers forgiveness and a renewal of their relationship (14:27-27). So the young man's running away is corrected and he has experienced a conversion that has made him a witness to the handing over of Jesus and a proclaimer of the Resurrection. In him and in Peter reconciliation is promised for the weak who have not understood and have failed whether these be the apostates of the community in Rome or the believers in worldly power and dominance in Fiji in our time.

Peace-builders can learn from Jesus to cross boundaries and sign systems of outsider/insider with a "listening heart" (Schreiter 1985). "Boundary crossing calls us to be participant observers," to move from stereotypes and categorization to empathetic understanding. A shallow awareness and understanding is one of the disciples' main problems in Mark. The dialectic in the negotiation phase of peace-making involves the peace-builder paying attention first to one group and then to the other. Both groups have to be encouraged to overcome their fears and ignorance, to oppose their community's stereotypes, prejudices and myths and to make the boundary more porous and flexible. Then the different ethnic communities can learn to become more inclusive and to build a national identity without denying or destroying their ethnic identity.

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*Archbishop Petero  
Mataca*

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Petero Mataca is the Head of  
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## Peace – A Common Journey

*(Keynote Address for the National Workshop  
on Peace and Conflict Resolution)*

What is peace? Peace is the opposite of war. Peace means total harmony within the community. It is founded upon order and permeated by God's blessing, and hence makes it possible for any human being to develop and increase free and unhindered on every side. Therefore, peace must be established between mankind and God, among men and women as individuals, among nations and among creation. God will not bring about this peace by his direct act. He has given us the task to realize peace by our just and blameless conduct.

### Brief Overview

Peace building and resolving conflicts is a difficult task. But it must be performed daily. Because in our case, some people are convinced that political democracy cannot work with the communal system and as such, democracy is identified with Indo-Fijians' quest for political power to further their economic interests. And some believe that political democracy is the only system of governance that could guarantee everyone's human rights, irrespective of race or religion. As such indigenous Fijians are accused as 'backwards' and their system of sharing and caring is a major drawback in their development. Such firm





viewpoints, though genuinely felt, are not helpful but perpetuate and give on-going legitimacy to race politics. However, there needs to be an appreciation that Fiji

*... there needs to be an appreciation that Fiji is experiencing rapid changes in its society and there are tensions*

is experiencing rapid changes in its society and there are tensions. The tensions come from the diversity of races, of religions and classes in the Fiji society. These tensions are to be acknowledged and addressed all the time and everywhere.

The indigenous Fijians find themselves caught between the values of communal life and the values of democratic system. This is an issue they need to face with courage. They also need to acknowledge and critically examine the power plays that are going on between the Fiji Government and the Fijian Administration and between the chiefly class and the new elite class and the *tawa vanua*. Many indigenous Fijians feel that their identity needs to be strengthened, but also need to acknowledge that it is not static. But is evolving all the time. The challenge for them is in ensuring that all participate in the evolution of their identity. This in itself is a huge task that requires a moral commitment and courageous leadership.

For the Indo-Fijians and others, ethnic politics is also part of their story, and while they are more comfortable under democratic rule, they need to acknowledge the fact that liberal democracy cannot be an overnight solution to ethnic and class problems. Political democracy is not the only system of governance and allowance must be made to accommodate cultural and traditional insights to governance. The crucial challenge in the country's desire for a unifying vision, is how to accommodate differences of political opinion within and in relation to each ethnic community.

## Strategies for Peace-building

The military coups of 1987 came as a serious blow to Fiji's development. Their repercussions set the country back at least ten years. Yet there was a positive learning experience as well. The coups highlighted the demand that indigenous Fijian interests be heard and addressed. The years that followed saw a lot of work being done to address the indigenous interests and yet balance these against the interests of other Fiji citizens and international demands for democracy. The 1997 constitution was the culmination of much consultation and its almost universal acceptance was received with great rejoicing. It appeared that Fiji had finally 'got it right'.

*The reasons for the May 19<sup>th</sup> coup were certainly  
more complex than the declared 'cause'*

Yet within a few  
years Fiji  
experienced  
another coup  
with the claim

that indigenous Fijian interests still had not been addressed and that the 1997 constitution must be abrogated. The reasons for the May 19<sup>th</sup> coup were certainly more complex than the declared 'cause'. But it was obvious that some indigenous, felt that their concerns had not been fully addressed. One thing is now clear – we must get it right this time for our sake and our children.

### Understanding hopes and aspirations, griefs and fears

Human life is lived with a mixture of hopes and joys, griefs and fears. Many of these arise out of the social, economic and political realities of the time. Conflicts of interests mean that the hopes and aspirations of some are the anxieties of others, and that the joys of some become the fears and disquiet of others. Hopes and aspirations generate the zeal to struggle for their realization. The intensity of that struggle can frighten and unsettle those who stand to lose as these aspirations begin to be



realized. Fear and anxiety lead people to close ranks in defence of their interest, setting up oppressive structures to maintain them. Such clashes of hopes and fears and their heightened conflicts make up much of our political history.

From a Christian perspective, we profess that God created human beings in love and truth. He gifted women and men with dignity and called on them to respect one another and the world in which they live. The Old Testament laws and the witness of the prophets attempted to restore and maintain human dignity and respect for it by enshrining the love and compassion of God in social justice. Jesus endorsed and extended these principles; and by dying and rising he became the source of new life. Empowered by the Holy Spirit Jesus began the work of re-creation. Since Christians are the Body of Christ, they are agents of re-creation. They are to re-create in their life the life of God the Trinity. That is one in three and three in one.

Throughout history, people have struggled to maintain human dignity and protect human rights against the pressure of vested interests. Today, we are called to continue that struggle. Peace and reconciliation therefore has to :

- Redress the evils of the past, including corruption and mismanagement of public money;
- Act positively to overcome the disadvantages arising from injustices;
- Protect the weak, dispossessed and the marginalized irrespective of race and religion;
- Respect the human person and as "image and likeness of God";
- Safeguard citizens from the greed and aggression of others;
- Protect the environment by acting as stewards and custodians of all creation;
- Enshrine the values of truth and freedom, justice and peace.

## Suggested Practical Steps

Peace building and reconciliation must take place at all levels of society. It is a process that will take time and will be painful. The following is a proposed framework for the important task of peace building and conflict resolution.

*Unless Fiji learns from its past mistakes it is bound to repeat them*

It is important to discover the root causes and the various dimensions of the conflicts. This demands sound social and historical analysis. Unless Fiji learns

from its past mistakes it is bound to repeat them. Political, racial, religious, economic and class issues have been deeply interwoven down through the years of Fiji's history.

There are power struggles among indigenous Fijian elite and the constituencies they represent. Religious overtones add fuel to the racial and political conflicts when Christians demand Fiji to be a Christian state and thus use religion to justify the domination of one race by another. Then there are the all-pervasive economic interests of the elite, which cut across racial boundaries. Those who prosper under the new economic policies see no need for the more equitable distribution of wealth and resources. The result is an increase in crime and social frustration among many – especially rural communities and urban youth.

What are the issues that need to be addressed to prevent a recurrence of such crisis in the future? This would involve looking seriously at the real and perceived grievances of the indigenous Fijians as well as the hopes of Indo-Fijians. Some of the perceptions amongst indigenous Fijians, which need to be addressed, are mentioned below:

- a) Indigenous Fijians are poor while Indo-Fijians are rich;
- b) Indigenous Fijians should be paramount in their own land;
- c) Fiji should be declared a Christian state;



- d) Indigenous Fijians have been generous in making land and resources available yet they see others prosper and little in return come back to them;
- e) Commerce and business sectors are a preserve of Indo-Fijians;
- f) Indigenous Fijian land and fishing rights must be assured and protected;
- g) Democracy needs to be balanced against the need to protect indigenous privileges.

The hopes of many Indo-Fijians would hinge around the following issues:

- a) A democratic constitution to guarantee their rights as citizens;
- b) A system of governance that will provide a sense of security;
- c) That Fiji sees itself as a multi-cultural and multi-religious nation;
- d) A greater sense of and appreciation of their contribution;
- e) That not all Indo-Fijians are wealthy;
- f) That steps be taken to provide some security over land leases.

Over the years five important issues seem to constantly re-emerge. They are:

- a) The need for improvement in the education of indigenous Fijians – involving more serious family commitment and individual motivation as well as better teachers and resources.
- b) The need to develop indigenous expertise in the business and commercial sector. The ‘hand-out’ mentality implied in the recent ‘blueprint’ provides no long-term solution for authentic indigenous Fijian development. The scandal following the ‘affirmative action’ for indigenous Fijians after the 1987 coups should not be repeated. Loans and scholarships make elite indigenous Fijians more powerful but leave on the street indigenous Fijians as they are. Thus the gap between rich and poor indigenous Fijians is widening all the time.
- c) The need for government to address poverty across the board – irrespective of race. The view that indigenous Fijians are the poorest is a misrepresentation of information. Such misrepresentation of

- information is a convenient tool for some to maintain fear and confusion among people and further divide them along ethnic lines.
- d) The need for the proper distribution of wealth to prevent inequality. There is a danger that, to promote economic recovery, policies of the past will be repeated resulting in privileges for investors and unjust wages, poor working conditions, and harsh labour laws for workers.
  - e) The need for a unifying vision. A start would be to review the concept of 'separate development'. This includes the review of the Fijian Administration and the Indo-Fijian Advisory Councils and different Union groupings.

What are the practical steps that need to be taken in addressing these issues?

- a) There is an urgent need for on-going reconciliation. But, for reconciliation to work at the national level, the central issue of ethnic politics must be addressed at the personal and communal levels because ethnic politics have played a major role in the deep-seated divisions in the nation. The reconciliation process must not become politicized nor treated as a 'separate development' issue. It must urgently seek to expose and do away with the politics of ethnicity if there is to be a new liberating future. Part of this exercise is to collectively rewrite our history. This should be an urgent need if we are to have a sound and balanced national historical memory.
- b) There is a need for each ethnic community to move away from racial stereotypes and become 'self-critical' because reconciliation and healing demand a 'conversion of mind and heart.' It must critically look at how, at the personal and community levels, the politics of race has affected people and shaped their perceptions of other ethnic communities including their social and economic development. This involves a critical look at the social and cultural structures of each ethnic community and how politics of race has influenced and shaped policies and attitudes. As such the process of reconciliation is tied up with the need to articulate a vision of a



just society and the search for a national identity.

- c) We need an educated grass-root people. They are to be educated on issues where there is a misunderstanding and outright ignorance. Three issues will suffice as examples:

- The myth that 'Indians are rich and Fijians are poor' can easily be dispelled by an explanation of the analysis of poverty and inequality presented in the Fiji Poverty Report (1996). The Report makes it clear that poverty and inequality are issues that cut across the board and cannot be seen in purely racial terms. In fact, Indo-Fijian cane cutters and many of the Solomonese community are amongst the poorest people in Fiji.
- Many individual Fijians seem unclear about the system of distributing lease and royalty money. In view of economic disparities within the indigenous community, there is a need to re-examine the system of distribution of lease and royalty money. Are the *tawa vanua* receiving their fair share or not? This necessitates the review of the NLTB Laws.
- Misunderstanding and deliberate misinterpretation of the Constitution have led to unnecessary confusion in the minds of many about the constitutional guarantees of indigenous Fijian privileges and interests. For future social and political stability, it is important that the ordinary person be informed of the safeguards and protection of basic human privileges of all and of indigenous interests and privileges.

*Some Christian Churches have allowed themselves to be used for nationalistic agenda rather than for the agenda of the Kingdom of God*

- d) There is an urgent need for the Churches to make a thorough examination of their role in justifying ethnic politics and fuelling racial and political conflicts. Some Christian Churches have allowed themselves to be used for nationalistic agenda rather than for the agenda of the Kingdom of God. Jesus invites his followers to

love and to share what they have even with their enemies. The Kingdom of God is about treating each other as brothers and sisters in the one family of God; it is about giving and asking for forgiveness; it is about outgoing generosity and compassionate concern for others, especially the little ones.

- e) The role of the military in a multi-cultural society has to be looked at seriously.
- f) The Government and civil society including all Communities of Faith are partners in the work of development. Hence the Government needs to acknowledge the important role of civil society. Therefore, it would do well if it puts in place structures for dialogue on such issues as formulation of the national budget, the revision of ALTA, remodeling the NLTB, a just national wage etc.

At the same time, the many NGO groups and the different Communities of Faith should see themselves as having a special responsibility at this time in Fiji's history. They should take initiative and suggest new possibilities, monitor government policies (particularly where they affect the poor and marginalized), do research in areas of obvious need, and challenge the Government about priorities and concerns. Economic recovery is a central issue for Fiji at this time but civil society must continually stress that the economy is for people and not people for the economy. National growth must go hand in hand with equitable distribution of wealth.

There is a need for a clear, just and sustainable vision. There is a need to articulate a vision in which all can feel secure. Having heeded the lessons of recent and past events, Fiji should consider how social and political structures and future relationships might be different, more equitable and more just. The search for a political solution is closely related to the whole process of reconciliation. This, in turn would provide political stability and be a necessary pre-condition for investor confidence.





An important question that will be crucial for a just and sound solution to the political crisis is how to keep an acceptable balance between universal democratic rights and indigenous rights. The other crucial question is whether Fiji begins this search from the premise that the two are compatible and go hand in hand, or from the assumption that there needs to be a trade-off. One of the fundamental problems Fiji faces is how to ensure that any political arrangement it comes up with will last longer than the next election. Constitutions are not set in stone, but neither should they be written in pencil, to be erased and amended at will. They need to have some degree of permanency. A legal way must be found to foil and punish any possible coup leader in the future from interfering with the country's constitution.

### General Conclusion: A Time for Despair or a Time for Hope

In conclusion, the Chinese character for 'crisis' is composed of two characters meaning 'danger' and 'opportunity' reminding us that out of a time of crisis new opportunities can arise.

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, God is always talking about a new song, a new city, a new heart, a new spirit, a new time and hope. Usually these phrases come after a time of discouragement and defeat. After the first coups of 1987 an atmosphere of hopelessness and fear gripped this nation. Yet out of the ashes of despair and despondency, hope and life began to emerge. Out of the atmosphere of racial mistrust and fear, Fijians and Indo-Fijians came together determined to build bridges of racial and religious understanding.

Interfaith Search Fiji grew and blossomed as an organization, which brought together the various Communities of Faith in Fiji. The Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF) grew out of a felt need for people of different political and racial backgrounds to come together and discuss a common basis on which the future development of Fiji could be

built. The Fiji Forum for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation also emerged after the coups of 1987 to address issues of injustice and poverty and to confront the Interim and elected government with an alternative vision of development which was people friendly. The ECREA (formerly the FCC Research Group) was also founded at this time to evaluate current issues through Christian eyes and to propose new possibilities. Many other groups at the more grass-root levels also sprang to life and dreamt of new visions for the future. The Unions, Women's organizations, Youth groups and academics – were all stirred to new life and hope. Despite the much-publicised incidents of racial hatred and arrogant defiance of law and order we are now witnessing a time of restoration and stability.

Stories of inter-racial concern and real love are beginning to emerge. An indigenous Fijian landowner provided land for the displaced Indo-Fijian cane farmers. An Indo-Fijian taxi driver spoke of his happiness to see that the indigenous Fijian dominated military were bringing peace to everyone making him feel that Fiji is still his home. Indigenous Fijian villages near Queen Victoria School sheltered Indo-Fijian families. Despite those who plan to migrate, many still stay and build again for a more secure future. Fiji is a country that is used to re-building. Cyclones destroy the work of years in a few minutes but people survive and rebuild. New growth miraculously appears and life goes on. We are strengthened by times of crisis to dry our tears and rebuild with hope for the future. This time Fiji must learn from the past and build itself on a solid foundation that will promise hope and security for all.

I wish to conclude with these words I wrote in June 1987 : "Now is the time not to destroy but to build up our nation. It is not the time to divide but to unify. It is not the time to be arrogant, but to listen to one another. It is not the time to be silent, but to speak out truthfully and honestly. It is not the time to accuse, but to examine oneself. It is not the time to hate, but to understand and forgive. It is not the time to justify oneself, but to ask for forgiveness. Because now is the time for dialogue, for repentance and reconciliation."



## Closing Keynote Address

*(National Workshop  
on Peace and Conflict Resolution)*



*Tessa Mackenzie*

*Tessa Mackenzie, amongst being an active member of various Committees, is the Secretary of the Interfaith Search, Fiji.*

I was privileged this week to view an exhibition of paintings by Jane Ricketts. The exhibition is called "Two Faces of Fiji". In her work, Jane shows the face of conflict and the face of peace.

The brutal face of power in one picture is contrasted with gentleness of a woman peeling dalo in another; a balaclava-clad gunman on one wall, a fisherman poling down a quiet creek on another; sorrow amid the ruins of a home in one picture contrasts with the joy of wedding preparations in another.

This dichotomy is ever present in our lives, though thankfully the oppression is not often too blatant as here in Fiji last year, or in recent years in the western Pacific.

The goal of achieving a Culture of Peace is a bold one, a necessary one, and urgent if we are to avoid being overtaken by the forces of intolerance and conflict.

I know that during these days together you will have searched these two faces of Fiji, these two aspects of our human condition, for understanding and solutions. You will have probed the roots of conflict and looked for seeds of peace.

I have been grateful to be able to share in listening to some of the excellent speakers that ECREA chose to give you guidance and ideas.

It was good to hear the voice of the young people. Our authoritarian societies find it difficult to give space and credibility to children and youth. By repressing the younger generation, we foster power hungry adults.

I was particularly impressed with Professor Subramani's suggestion and description of pluralism. For Interfaith Search Fiji, religious pluralism is what we seek to achieve through dialogue and discussion, aiming both to deepen our understanding of each other's beliefs and to affirm one another's integrity.

There is an alarming rise of fundamentalism and exclusivity in sections of religions world-wide, which allows little room for negotiation and dialogue.

It is a deep concern to us in Interfaith Search Fiji that so many people in this country, and particularly the Christians, are not prepared to enter into dialogue and discussion. However, all over the world there is a great realization among Christians that the plurality of religions is a reality, and that this plurality is the result of the many ways in which God is revealed to people. It is a facet of the rich diversity of humankind.

The World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church both have Offices for Inter-religious Relations and Dialogue. The Council for World Mission recently published a series of theological papers in which the plurality of religions is affirmed.

*We can find points of correspondence  
between our religious traditions,  
but they are not interchangeable*

Coming together with open minds in our Interfaith Search programme of discussions, we find a deepening of our own

personal understanding and beliefs, as we learn more about each other's beliefs. We can find points of correspondence between our religious



traditions, but they are not interchangeable. There is no intention to absorb the rich diversity of beliefs into one universal religion, as some fear. It is not assimilation, but pluralism that is our goal.

We need to seek those good things that all religions preach. Peace and peace-building is a theme common to all sacred writings and Holy Scriptures. All religions accept our common humanity. They promote care for the poor and underprivileged and they acknowledge our responsibility to care for creation and the environment.

Through sharing our religious beliefs and teachings we can build on the good we have in common.

I recall being very impressed to find that one of those detained in Parliament for two months last year used the time to read the sacred scriptures of the two major religions other than his own. I don't need to tell you that breaking down our prejudices can only come through greater knowledge and deeper understanding.

We need to find more creative ways to share the resources of the earth and sustain them for future generations. People are also an important resource. We need to look beyond job-creation policies, treating people as statistics and factory fodder.

Our education system needs a revolution. As has been wisely suggested, better skills in vernacular (I hesitate to say 'mother-tongue' – would 'parent-tongue' do?), better skills in our own and each other's languages is vital, but it is only part of the picture.

Concentration on academic subjects and sports does not give room for the holistic development our young people urgently need, and deserve.

Where are our visionaries, our thinkers and dreamers? Where are our artists and musicians and poets? They exist, believe you me. I frequently come across young people who have failed in the school system, but

who are talented, and, sadly, frustrated. I am thankful for the existence of the Oceania Centre at USP, but it is only a drop in the Ocean!

Education literally means to draw out, not to push in, yet our education is devoted to instilling facts in young minds, instead of developing a thirst for knowledge and understanding, and the analytical skills with which to deal with life's problems.

We need to get away from the competitiveness which gives prominence to the few, and destroys the confidence of the many.

The acknowledgement of our common humanity encourages us to affirm the value of every individual person, from every background or ethnicity.

*Fiji is our home, either through  
accident of history or choice, and we  
are now strangers to the lands from  
which we or our ancestors came*

As a "vulagi", I appreciated Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi's comments. We can understand the Fijian fears of being numerically small and therefore vulnerable. We also are

few in number, whether we are Indo-Fijians or 'Others'. Fiji is our home, either through accident of history or choice, and we are now strangers to the lands from which we or our ancestors came. We too feel insecurity. Instead of playing on our fears, we should strive to find ways to support one another.

This week has given you tools for use in our communities, tools with which to resolve conflicts, build true reconciliation and to promote just and harmonious relations.

Today is Friday, the end of the week, the end of your week working together. Even though this session is in the programme as the Closing Session, there can be no closing. There can be no end.

"Towards a Culture of Peace" is an on-going theme, and a continuing programme for at least two years, perhaps even longer. Certainly it is a ceaseless task.



When one has a time of intensive study and work, as you have experienced, and I hope enjoyed, then there is a high, an exhilaration, an enthusiasm to make changes, to start afresh, to carry through the promises made. This week is worth nothing without that commitment to use the skills that you have gained.

This is the challenge – to go out and perform, but it will not be easy.

I want to put before you an image which you may not be comfortable with, but which I hope will stimulate you. The tools you have been given are digging sticks or spades, cane knives, fertilizer. We are probably, most of us, more used to using pens, than digging forks!

For so long our part of the world was thought of as Pacific – Peaceful, described by some as a Garden of Eden. Well, we now realise that some of the plants growing in this garden are problem plants – weeds that choke the growth of good plants, creepers that cover everything, that take over control of the bush. Up in the hills there is marijuana, a plant that gives false promises and panders to selfish desires for pleasure and power.

Cane knives may be needed for some of the work that lies ahead, digging implements are most certainly needed to root out the undesirable elements and prepare the ground; fertilizer, together with constant care and vigilance is needed to nurture and protect the seedlings of peace. The weeds of injustice and intolerance will easily grow again.

When the going gets tough, and it certainly will – the heavy rains we have been experiencing this week make us aware of the possibility of flooding – there is always a danger that a flood of disillusionment, leading to hopelessness, despair, apathy and an inaction will destroy all the good work of this week.

It is only through on-going hard work and continual effort that we can bring our Pacific Garden into full production as a true Garden of Eden, in which justice and peace flourish.

It's a big undertaking. It will involve work additional to our normal daily occupations – we will have to give time.

It will involve hard work, requiring lots of energy and enthusiasm. We will need patience. Use the skills with which you have been equipped, take up those tools, and let's create a Garden of Peace.

I wish you every success in your endeavors.





## Moved by Passion to a Compassionate Mission

(Bible Reading: Acts 16:6-10; Sermon Text: Acts. 10:9)

**“That night Paul had a vision in which he saw a  
Macedonian standing and begging him;  
“Come over to Macedonia and help us!”**

*Passion*, in a christian context applies exclusively to the redemptive suffering of Jesus. It refers in particular to the last days of Jesus' earthly ministry that culminates in his crucifixion. With reference to: ***“moved by passion to a compassionate mission”*** in the context of Paul's missionary experiences, a notion of ***‘suffering with Christ in God's compassionate and liberating mission’*** is recalled.

### Introduction

Often in life we have to learn to expect the unexpected. In this regard, the relevance of the hymn we have just sung - What ship is this we are sailing in - about a 'sailing boat' that crosses many seas, calm waters, strong currents, storms and so on, did not cross my mind until the singing was over. Since a boat is a powerful image which is commonly used for mission, I want to begin with a story of a recent inter-island mission which was made possible by sailing on a motor boat.



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## A Story

Last week, those of us who were participants in the Workshop on Contextual Theology at Nadave paid a visit to the two small Islands of Bau and Viwa. These islands are of historic importance in Fiji, not only because of their political history but also because of the history of the Christian mission in Fiji, particularly the initial reception of Christianity in the *Vanua ko Viti*.

The small island of Bau is the seat of the traditional paramount chief: Ratu Cakobau. He was the chief who first accepted Christianity as a true religion, and of course the religion of his people. Being loyal to chiefly authority, some indigenous Fijians today still insist that Christianity must be adopted as the only acceptable popular religion or the *lotu ni vanua*.

In the light of the early Christian mission in Fiji, the history of the island of Viwa cannot be divorced from Bau. The stories or traditions of the two islands are intersected by the history of Christianity. These histories coincide with the names of the two well-known missionaries: John Hunt and Sioeli Bulu. Both of them were buried on one of these islands. We visited their graves on an elevated landscape, beside the church in Viwa.

The Pacific church historian, John Garrett in his book, *To Live Among the Stars*, states that John Hunt, with the help of Noa, a native islander, managed to produce the first translation of the Bible into the vernacular of the indigenous Fijians. He was also the one who finally convinced Cakobau to give up his cannibalistic attitude that legitimated the ritual practice of human sacrifice.

We were informed by the people of Viwa that when Hunt saw thick smoke and a white banner on the island of Bau (which were signs for the performance of sacrificial rites), he walked down to the beach, took his canoe to the sea and rowed it to Bau. Arriving there, he prayed and intervened on behalf of the people who were being taken for



sacrifice. At the same time, he tried to convince the chief of Bau to be converted to Christianity through the preaching of the Word as well as through his own humble and peaceful Christian examples. His life was endangered on several occasions but he later earned Cakobau's respect. His death was "crucial in leading Cakobau to submit eventually to Christ". In sum, John Hunt was moved by passion to a compassionate mission.

Sioeli Bulu is also known for his impressive missionary work in Fiji. Born in Vavau, an Island of Tonga in early 1800, Bulu was converted to Christianity as an adult through the preaching of the missionary Peter Turner. Bulu described his own conversion as a "shattering experience of being physically overtaken by the Spirit's power." It was through this experience that he came to know Jesus Christ as Savior and to bear witness to Christ's transforming life. Regarding his passionate commitment to mission, he stated (John Garrett):

"If the words be true which were told us today (by the missionary), then are these *lotu* people happy indeed; for I saw that the earth was dark and gloomy, while the heavens were clear, and bright with many stars, and my soul longed with great longing to reach that beautiful land. I will *lotu*, that I may live among the stars."

Other details about the missionary life of Bulu reveal that he was attacked by a shark in the sea off Rewa but, he courageously managed to kill the furious sea creature. He was also the last chaplain to Cakobau. His teachings inspired the *waqatana* (lay preachers) gospel movement; a ministry that found root in the faith of the native Fijians. Again, Bulu suffered with Christ for the sake of God's mission. He was moved by passion to a compassionate mission!

From these brief narratives, we can say that the two missionaries were moved and inspired by their faith in Jesus Christ and the Gospel of Salvation. Their commitments and sacrifices were founded on a deep conviction that, through their toils in the Christian mission, they were

identifying with the suffering Christ in God's compassionate, prophetic and liberating mission.

## Textual Exposition

Paul saw in a vision a Macedonian standing and begging him: *Come over to Macedonia and help us!* This is an invitation to mission. It is indeed, a plea and a call for help.

In the reading, we are told of the story of Paul, the pioneer missionary. At this time, Paul arrived in the city of Troas. On several occasions, we are told that Paul and his co-workers planned to visit and take the gospel message to certain cities, but they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit. The reasons for this are not directly indicated. Presumably, the author may have deliberately ignored this for an unknown purpose. What is obvious from this, however, is the understanding that Paul's commitment to the Christian mission was guided solely by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit determines or identifies through visionary experiences the places where the gospel is urgently needed to be preached. Apart from that, the Holy Spirit discloses through visionary experiences the places where the Gospel is urgently needed. Luke in Acts emphasizes this fact: that the Spirit inspires and moves a missionaries through visionary experiences.

### "Come Over and Help Us".

The Book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke together synthesize the central idea of God's liberating mission through the activity of the Holy Spirit, as well as the prophetic and the life-affirming work of Jesus. Luke and Acts commonly perceive Jesus Christ as the Liberator who is inspired and guided by the Spirit of God – the New Moses, yet greater than Moses, for Jesus is a great Healer and Savior. Jesus is the great Respector of human dignity. Jesus is the great Restorer of the wholeness of all humankind. Moreover, Jesus did not suffer for the poor and the oppressed, but he suffered in solidarity with them. And it was passion that moved him in his life-mission, all the way to the



cross. He never side-stepped the sting of the cross because of his passion for life.

It is no doubt that Paul was inspired by this story – the account of the Christ who was moved by passion to a prophetic, life-affirming, caring and saving mission. That is why Paul responded to the vision as an idea whose time had come. The call ‘to come over and help’ was an inspired idea which moved the missionary with great enthusiasm, knowing that, with his own suffering, he was identifying with Christ’s own passion in God’s compassionate and liberating mission.

Like Jesus Christ, Paul was moved by passion to a compassionate mission. But Paul, being inspired by the suffering Christ, also moved out geographically, religiously and culturally crossing boundaries of every sort in order for the compassionate mission of God to take root, grow and bear fruit in other lands and with other people – the Gentiles. Crossing boundaries became the context and theme of his life. Thus, Paul becomes the champion and model of an effective missionary movement, for he was convinced that the Way of Jesus Christ transcends ethnic, social, sexual and all other boundaries or differences. According to Luke in Acts, Paul and his co-workers immediately crossed over to Macedonia to proclaim the Good News to the people there.

Being ‘moved by passion to a compassionate mission’ is a challenge and a call for us today. Like Paul who saw a dream figure of a Macedonian, we can experience in our local communities and abroad the multitudes of Macedonians calling for help. Here in this region and among our people, we are confronted by the full gamut of life’s miseries – the miseries of poverty, alienation, exploitation, violence, abuse and so forth. Their victims are the Macedonians of our time, calling and begging us to come to their aid - to move beyond our boundaries, to walk the extra mile and lend a helping hand. Our call is not to convert people to a particular faith, but simply to embody the Gospel through the proclamation of the Word and the living out of the Good News.

In the theology and mission of the church today, we become more and more acquainted with the picture of a 'suffering Christ' created by a suffering people. They are crying out, yearning for comfort and relief. What then are we going to offer? How are we going to carry out this mission? We do so only when we are moved by passion, by the heart that trusts and painfully suffers with Christ in the cause of God's redeeming love for all. We are to be mindful at all times of our commitment to such a missionary enterprise, including our theologizing and its impact and relevance for our very immediate and living contexts.



# Pacific Journal of Theology

## Policy Statement

The Pacific Journal of Theology is published twice yearly by the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. It seeks to stimulate theological thinking and writing by Christians living in or familiar with the South Pacific, and to share these reflections with church and theological education communities, and with all who want to be challenged to reflect critically on their faith in changing times. Opinions and claims made by contributors to the Journal are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board or the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools.

The Editorial Board welcomes various kinds of writing which express an emerging Pacific theology. These may include:

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- Helpful material for pastors and church workers (liturgical, pastoral, educational);
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- Notes and reviews of books which are relevant for Pacific Christians;
- Information about ongoing research in the theological disciplines in the Pacific.

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should be clearly typed in double spacing on one side of the paper only. any sources quoted or paraphrased should be listed in endnotes and a bibliography at the end of the article, including author, title, city, publisher, and date of publication. Please include brief autobiographical data.

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